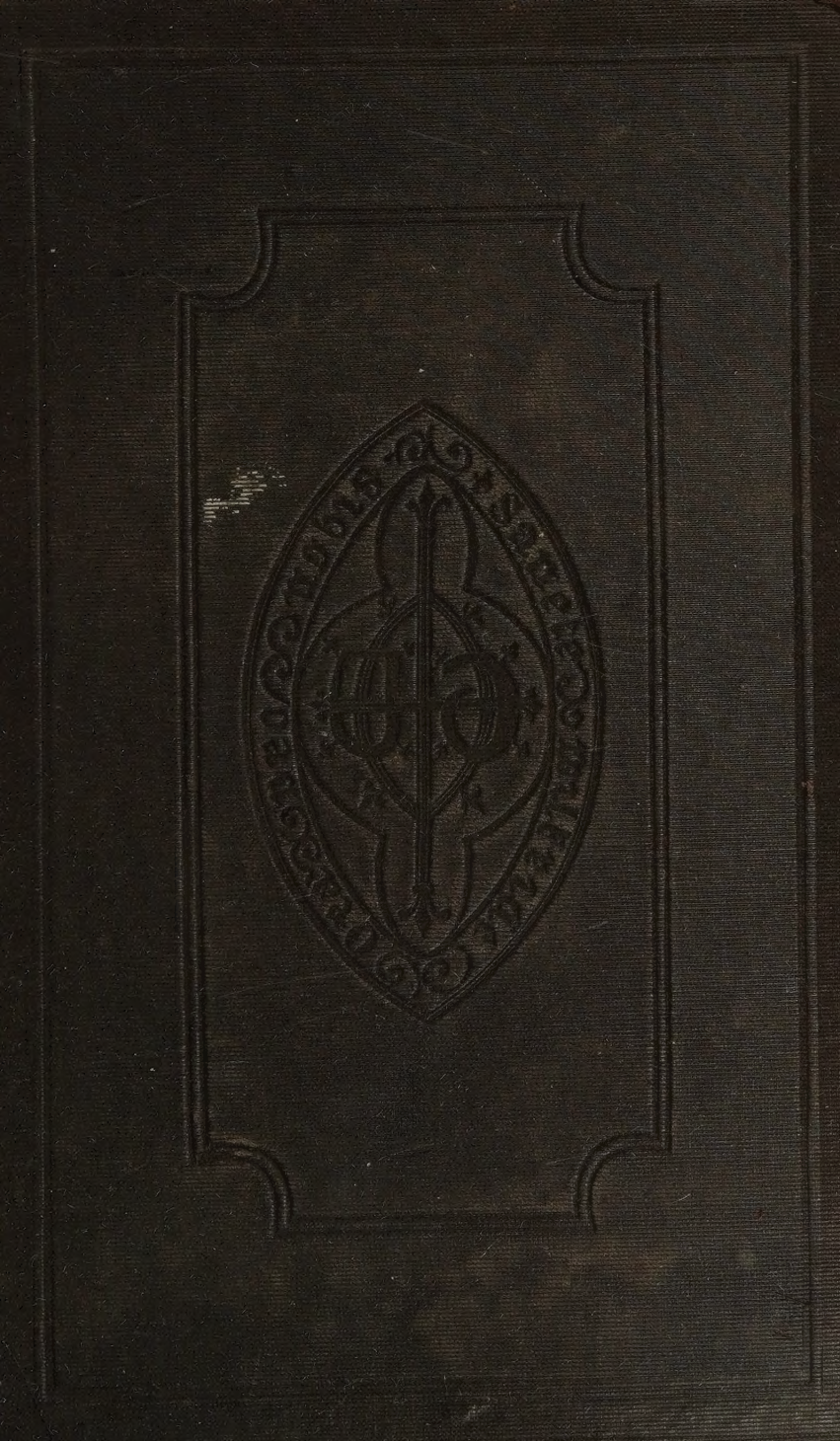

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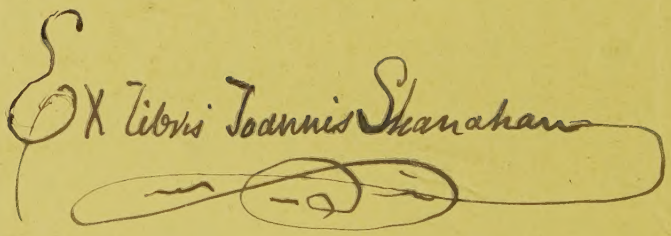

B. SEBASTIAN VALFRÈ.

The Fathers of the Oratory.

THE LIVES

OF THE

BLESSED SEBASTIAN VALFRÉ,

OF THE ORATORY OF TURIN;

FATHER ANTONIO DE' SANTI,

FOUNDER OF THE ORATORY OF PADUA;

FATHER ANGELO MATTEUCCI,

FOUNDER OF THE ORATORY OF CAMERINO;

AND OTHERS.

"Gaude Maria Virgo, cunctas hæreses sola interemisti in universo mundo."—*Antiph. Ecclesiæ.*

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PREFACE.

The Life of the Blessed Sebastian Valfré contained in this volume is translated from an anonymous biography by one of the Fathers of the Oratory of Turin, dedicated to Gregory XVI. by Giovanni Calleri, Priest of the Roman Oratory, and Postulator of the Cause. It issued from the press of Salviucci at Rome in the autumn of 1834.

The other Lives in the volume are taken from Marciano's Annals of the Congregation; and, as the nature of that work and the author's style seemed to require, are not so much translations as compilations and paraphrases.

If this volume should meet with a favourable reception it will be followed at uncertain intervals by other Lives of the Fathers of the Oratory.

St. Wilfrid's,
Feast of St. Thomas Aquinas, 1849.

Ac. 4750

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THE LIFE

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CHAPTER I.

BIRTH OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN—THE FIRST INSTANCES OF HIS PIETY AND LEARNING—HIS VOCATION AND PROMOTION TO THE ECCLESIASTICAL STATE.

Verduno, a village situated on a hill in the diocese of Alba in Piedmont, was the native place of the Blessed Sebastian Valfré, who was born there on the 9th of March, 1629, and was on the same day regenerated in holy baptism. The family, Valfré, was honourable and ancient, but so reduced through misfortunes, that Giambatista, his father, and Argentina Manzona, his mother, lived and supported a numerous offspring by tilling the soil and cultivating the few acres they possessed with their own hands. But the piety of these most worthy parents supplied the place of the best patrimony in the world.

A most tender compassion towards the poor was the particular virtue which began to show itself in Sebastian so soon as he had acquired

the use of reason. When he heard persons asking an alms at the house door, he anxiously ran to his mother to obtain it, and distributed it to them. But the narrow circumstances of the family not always permitting this, Sebastian, who could not bear to send away without assistance those who sought it, wept so bitterly, that the neighbours on learning the cause ran to him, and gave him the necessary alms to dispense to the poor sufferers. He could always discern the most needy, and increased or diminished the alms accordingly, always accompanying them with some good admonition, making those whom he relieved make the sign of the cross, or teaching them the principal mysteries of our most holy religion.

In his most tender years he practised the greatest abstinence, as is clear from the attestation of the priest, Marco Antonio Garesio, also a native of Verduno, and afterwards rector of Perno in the diocese of Alba. "When I was about fourteen or fifteen years of age," thus he speaks, "my mother recommending me to fast some days of the week in the time of Lent, I remember perfectly well that she added as a reason for my doing so, that the servant of God, Sebastian Valfré, at about ten years of age fasted the whole of Lent on bread and water."

As to obedience, his parents never had to command the same thing twice, a word or a sign sufficing to make him obey with promptitude and cheerfulness. His mother one day left him in the kitchen, with direction to mind a kettle

full of must placed on the fire to boil, and to see that no accident happened. The son did as he was bidden; but being little experienced, in spite of his care the must boiled over and was spilt on the floor. The boy was grieved, and wept at the misfortune; but he could not repair it. He foresaw that his mother on coming back would probably scold and perhaps beat him; nevertheless, he would neither hide himself nor run away, as children usually do when they fear to be blamed or punished. The mother arrived, and the good son, as humble as he was courageous, went to meet her, saying with great tenderness and submission, "Mother, if you like to beat me, here I am; the must is all boiled over." The mother was much affected, admiring not only the obedience but the candid spirit of her son.

Meanwhile the voice of God made itself heard in his heart, calling him to the clerical state; but his parents protested that their slender patrimony, their numerous family of twelve children, and the calamities of the times, did not permit them to take upon themselves the expense of maintaining him at his studies out of his own country, a thing indispensably necessary if he wished to embrace that state. To these reasons Sebastian answered with prayers and tears, assuring his parents that he should be content with little aid, since without neglecting his studies he could gain necessary food and clothing by his industry and labour. His desires were at length yielded to, and he was sent to

study the Humanities, first at Alba and then at Bra, (whence his family drew its origin,) lodging in the house of his own master, with whom his friends thought he would be better taken care of and provided with what was needful.

But this man being of a harsh nature, obliged the poor boy to sleep like a beast of burden in a hay-barn, without even giving him enough to cover himself, where he passed the nights in cold and discomfort, not taking off the clothes he had on. His father, who came to Bra to know how his son was going on, observing him to be pale and thin, several times asked him what was the matter with him that he saw him so emaciated and out of condition; but notwithstanding his father's repeated solicitations the good child would not utter one word of complaint, nor mention the real cause of his ill state, but continually diverted the conversation from the subject, so that his father had to discover the thing in some other way.

Another circumstance which occurred in Bra made known the virtue of our Blessed Sebastian. A fellow-disciple of his, named Sebastian Cappello, having received an injury from one of his school-companions, wished to revenge himself for it. Valfré having heard of this went to find him, and with a mild air asked him if he had that morning repeated the Paternoster. Cappello, not foreseeing the aim of this simple question, answered that he had. "But did you repeat it with attention?" added Valfré with the same sweetness; the other again answered that

he had. "But then," concluded the wise monitor, "you must have observed those words, 'Dimitte nobis debita nostra, sicut et nos dimittimus.'" And here showing him the obligation which a Christian has to pardon offenders, he so moved the youth that he completely laid aside every feeling of anger.

His progress in his studies was equal to that of his piety, his masters admiring in him indefatigable application, great wit, and tenacity of memory, through which he speedily outstripped those of his own age. Continuing in his vocation to the ecclesiastical state, he received the clerical habit; and after having overcome many and great difficulties he was promoted in 1644, on the 21st of May, to the two first minor orders by the Bishop of Alba, M. Paul Brizio, who, in the following year, conferred upon him the two others.

After so happily beginning his course, he went to Turin to attend the courses of philosophy and theology. His father provided him with a cart-load of wine for his expenses, and this was the only supply sent to him from home; whence, in order to live and to procure for himself the most necessary things, he occupied himself day and night in copying writings and books, never forgetting to bestow some portion of his earnings on the poor.

Although the poor ecclesiastic was constrained to live in penury and incessant labours, he nevertheless applied himself with so much energy to his studies, that in the year 1650 he maintained

a public dispute on philosophy in general; after which, asking to be promoted to the subdeaconship, his bishop, wishing that he should not interrupt his scholastic course, had him ordained in Turin by M. Bergera, the archbishop, on the 17th of December of the same year. How highly the holiness and ecclesiastical virtues of Sebastian were esteemed in the university of Turin, may be inferred from the respect in which he was most especially held by his contemporaries and fellow-disciples, to whom he was ever most dear, and of whom, after he had been ordained priest, and authorised to hear confessions, many chose him for their confessor and for the director of their souls.

CHAPTER II.

ENTRANCE OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN INTO THE CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY OF TURIN—HIS ASSIDUITY AND CHARITY IN THE DISCHARGE OF THE VARIOUS OFFICES ASSIGNED TO HIM.

THE Congregation of the Oratory of Turin had been founded in the month of January in the year 1649, and, as usually happens to all pious foundations, its beginnings were weak, poor, and disturbed by various contradictions. Sebastian made his entry into it on the feast of the holy Father Philip Neri, on the 26th of May, 1651, being still subdeacon; but quite sudden-

ly, as it were, he was ordained deacon on the 3rd of June, the same year. The poor congregation, then in its infancy, had no lay-brothers; and the fervent novice, in imitation of the first companions of the saint, our founder, willingly took upon himself the most abject services, exercising them in the kitchen, at the gate, in the refectory, and in every office that was most mean and burdensome.

Nevertheless, while doing all this he was with the greatest recollection preparing himself for the priesthood, to which rank he attained on the 24th of February, 1652, being ordained by his own bishop in Alba. Having with exultation and fervour of spirit celebrated his first mass at Verduno, he immediately returned to his beloved congregation, which had been wonderfully prospered by God in temporal aids, and rendered illustrious by persons distinguished by learning and virtue. Then it was that the venerable fathers judged fit to confer on Sebastian the degree of doctor in theology; to this decision, in spite of his repugnance to honours, he yielded, and was therefore, after the customary tests, associated with the most learned college of theologians of the university.

Resolutely applying himself, as we have said, to study, he neglected not to employ his every care in more and more corresponding with his vocation, living as a true priest and perfect imitator of our holy father. This appeared in a wonderful degree when the congregation was transferred from a hired house near to St. Fran-

cis di Assisi, (in which it had begun,) into the suburb of Po, where it occupied a house given by the Abbé Lorenzo Scoffi, almoner of Christina of France, mother of Charles Emanuel II.; and thence into the church of the Corpus Domini, assigned to the Filippini by the pious decurions of the city. In both these places the Blessed Sebastian, increasing his labours and fervour, rendered, without intending it, his own name and that of his companions celebrated throughout the city, as well as in the suburb into which for fourteen years they returned to live: and through this it was that the congregation obtained the parish of St. Eusebius, which is still governed by it under the patronage of the most noble family of Rovere.

The first office entrusted by the congregation to the Blessed Sebastian, was that of Prefect of the Oratory. By oratory is meant an assembly of seculars, artisans, merchants, or nobles, as it may be, who are accustomed to meet every Sunday morning to attend to the exercises of piety prescribed by the institute, and introduced into Rome by St. Philip. These exercises, consisting of a spiritual lecture, a short meditation, a sermon, together with the frequenting of the Holy Sacraments, were promoted and practised by the Blessed Sebastian, although not consecutively, for the space of eighteen years during which he was Prefect, imitating in this office the affectionate and winning ways of the holy patriarch St. Philip. After the sermon he appointed some of those assembled to visit the

Seven Churches, and others to serve the sick in the Hospital of St. John.

During the three last days of the Carnival, the visit of the Seven Churches was general, every mode being studied of preventing or repairing the offences which are committed against God in those perilous days. Knowing that he could rely on the constancy of his sons, Sebastian, accompanied by them, passed and repassed through the streets and piazzas most frequented by the maskers and the wandering sons of Carnival license. In encountering the latter, such was the modesty, good order, and solid religion of the pious train, that not only were the tongues of the dissolute, (who at first began to utter abuse,) put to silence, but it often happened that some of the spectators being greatly moved left the masks and balls, and went with the holy company to join in their works of piety. At certain other times in the year, as on the Sundays preceding the principal solemnities, and on occasion of public necessities, he used to conduct them to the church of the Cistercian monks, under the title of Madonna della Consolata. There, in a subterraneous chapel, after a short spiritual lecture, he made a devout address and some other exercise of penitence with so much zeal and unction that all were excited to compunction and melted into tears. At other times he prescribed general communion in other churches either parochial or regular, always with the entire acquiescence of the superiors of them. As it would be superfluous to give an account of all and each of

these communions, two only will be recorded here, from which we may judge of the rest.

He one year conducted them on Quinquagesima Sunday to communicate in the Church of the Martyrs, governed by the Jesuit Fathers, where a solemn function was celebrated; leaving this about twelve o'clock, they walked in procession to the palace of the Archbishop, Mgr. Michela Beggiami, where dinner was prepared for them. This good prelate, already aware of the virtue and fervour by which the brothers of the Oratory edified the whole city, offered them a room in his own palace. The servant of God afterwards assisted them, during the dinner and the recreation, with spiritual reading, pious conferences, and exhortations, so that they passed the whole time as if they had been not seculars, but monks of consummate virtue. And such the archbishop took them to be, as is clearly testified by a note written with his own hand which he sent to them during the time of recreation, in which he said that he rejoiced exceedingly that his house had become the receptacle of so devout an assembly; and while he offered everything to them, he recommended himself to the prayers of all the guests and partakers.

In the year 1662 he gave notice of a general communion for the first Sunday of August, in the parochial church of the Royal Venaria, distant three miles from the capital, and dedicated to the Virgin Mary; and the first thing he did to sanctify that journey, was to prohibit all entrance into the royal palace or the pleasure

garden newly planted by Charles Emanuel II. and it was observed that there was not one who approached that delicious spot, nor that raised his eyes to behold it; but all of them with their eyes on the ground, devoutly reciting the Rosary in chorus having quickly arrived, they entered in regular order the parish church, where the servant of God, after having discoursed in the form of a dialogue with a priest of the mission whom he had brought with him, disposed all to participate with great fervour in the holy mysteries. The virtue of his discourse and the modesty of the brothers of the Oratory together brought great spiritual benefit to the inhabitants of the place; so that many of them having come to the sacred function possibly from mere curiosity, moved by both influences, desired to present themselves at the tribunal of penance, and thence, at the sacred table, with manifest signs of lively faith and of contrition for their sins. The holy function being ended, without turning to the right or left, the brothers went straight to the place at which refreshment was prepared for them; which, although very scanty, was sufficient for them, hungering as they did not after earthly but heavenly food. After their meal Sebastian made them assemble in a pleasant and open spot, entertaining them for the space of half an hour in an honest and a joyous recreation; and having formed them into a circle, he himself standing in the middle, he made some of them propose to him various doubts of

conscience, which he resolved with so great benignity as to captivate the affections of all who listened to him. The recreation being finished, as well as the spiritual conference, he began to explain the Christian doctrine with the priest whom he had with him; and such was the fruit of this exercise, that the brothers of the Oratory and all the other persons who had come to the place, greatly moved, protested aloud, (renewing resolutions already made,) that they would rather lose their lives than not observe the divine law for the future. Returning to their homes, faithful through the long space of the road to the orders of their director, they either walked in silence or discoursed on holy things. Arrived at the bridge of Dora close to the city, they re-united in devout order, and again began to recite the Rosary, and thus proceeded to the Church of the Congregation, where the servant of God thanking the Lord and St. Philip for the prosperous journey, dismissed them to their houses, not weary, but more desirous of like devout pilgrimages: and he, well aware of the spiritual good which they derived from them, willingly seconded their desires, particularly on the Sundays after Easter up to the first in November.

Beside this office, he many times during twenty years sustained that of superior. The entreaties he made at the end of the three years not to be confirmed in his office, and the tears he shed, were all to no purpose, justly persuaded as the fathers were that his exemplary

conduct and observance would give spirit, direction, and rule to the whole congregation. And he was in fact a perfect copy of St. Philip, animating and governing his sons. Hence it was his desire that the rules and observances of the institute should be obeyed by the fathers and the brethren with all integrity and exactitude; he considered as inobservant both those who without just cause failed in the common acts, and those who performed them with tepidity; nor could he excuse those who were wont to go to the Oratory, as he said, "gia sgrossato;" to come into the refectory after the benediction; to serve at table with as little trouble as possible and trusting to their companion: and so at the Oratory reciting the litanies and other prayers in a tone so low as not to be heard; and at table proposing cases, or making answers so as not to be intelligible. All which defects he maintained were extremely prejudicial to our holy institute.

He wished that his subjects should in every action, word, and gesture, observe a modest gravity, nor did a moderate hilarity displease him; but in the same measure he abhorred such as under pretence of joyousness gave way to frequent buffooneries. It happening that a novice, while reading at the common table, had uttered some playful expression in joke; Sebastian at once gently admonished him for having thus sought amusement out of season; but the culprit not duly feeling the paternal admonition, the man of God being much grieved corrected him with

somewhat greater rigour; and then that he might not depart from the suavity of manner which he observed in the government of the congregation, he declared to the person in question that he himself would do the penance due to the fault committed. He manifested no less solicitude in preventing the introduction of a quality or form of habit differing from what is prescribed by the rules of the holy founder, and used by the most aged and most observant of the community, who always contented themselves with wearing habits of coarse serge. A declared enemy of idleness, he was vigilant in preventing any one from remaining long at the kitchen fire in winter under pretext of warming himself; or in his chamber studying profane books or works of mere curiosity; or on the stairs and in the passages engaged in useless talk; against all these abuses he incessantly watched, and with gentle firmness studied to extirpate them. In the doubtful cases of the rule he had recourse to Rome, consulting the most enlightened and distinguished fathers of its congregation, the mother and the model of all others; and conformably to the answer, he directed both himself and the institute. Of all these questions, as well as of the answers received, a book was formed, which is still preserved in this congregation of Turin.

But as the end of every precept and the scope of every observance tends to the union of the minds of all living together, so to this he directed his most diligent and assiduous cares. He behaved with so much kind attention and esteem

towards the fathers and lay-brothers, as not to permit that any one of them should stand in his presence with his head uncovered; he praised and honoured all, and in passing through the city he was accustomed to yield the most worthy place to his companion, whoever he might be. He took care that none should be excessively burdened by labour, although he desired that every one should labour in proportion to his strength and ability. If there were sick in the house, beside making the visits prescribed by the institute, he often went to them to comfort them, and provide them with everything, recommending the father administrator and the physicians to spare no expense; and in case of necessity, it was his desire that even the funds of the congregation should be employed. When any one, though it were a layman, returned to Turin after some journey, he went to meet him, welcoming him with more than paternal affection. Cautious not to give disturbance or occasion inconvenience to any person whatsoever, he avoided even noisy footsteps near the doors or chambers of his neighbours. Did he perceive any one to be melancholy, or labouring under internal affliction, insinuating himself by the sweetness of his manner into his heart, he caused each trouble to vanish, and restored the sufferer to peace and cheerfulness. Thus his charitable attention was not a little augmented when he found out that any one was tempted to abandon the institute. It would be difficult to describe the efforts of his affectionate dili-

gence in keeping firm in his vocation a brother who wished for license to depart, the tender exhortations he addressed to him to move him from his purpose, or the invincible patience with which he bore with his obstinacy. He shed many tears, praying himself, and making others pray, in his own room, before the relics of the holy martyrs, (which had been given into his custody by the sovereign,) in order to obtain their patronage in favour of the rash brother; while to any one who wondered at the trouble he took about a lay-brother, the servant of God answered that had he not done what he could to retain him, he should have feared that, as a penalty, he himself by the just chastisement of God might have been excluded from the congregation from which the ill-advised person chose finally to depart.

The affectionate efforts used by the Blessed Sebastian had a happier issue in the case of a novice, who owing to certain frivolous commands imposed on him by the director, (for whom he had conceived a secret aversion,) had determined to leave; and also in that of a priest, who having with all secrecy packed up and sent away his moveables and left his room, was already beginning to descend the staircase in order to depart. Both these persons, wonderfully discovered in their design, yielded to his counsels, and entirely laying aside their former intentions, remained in the institute as long as they lived.

The extremely tender charity with which as

superior he ever ruled over the congregation, hindered him not in proper time and place from showing himself strong and intrepid. He never failed to discharge a turbulent and haughty subject, who profiting nothing by his advice and correction, disturbed and disunited the minds of the congregation. It is true, that in order to avoid being constrained to adopt these extreme remedies he did all that was possible to cure such evils so soon as he saw them arise. He was accustomed to give various instructions on this subject, extremely useful to any religious community whatsoever, some of which are here given.

I. To guard against an indiscreet zeal. "It is a great defect, (they are his own words) for any one to observe when others are absent from table, prayer, the confessional, oratory, &c. The subject who occasionally transgresses the common rule, has, perhaps, a just cause for so doing, which excuses him before God, although not known by all, nor by the greater part of the community. But be that as it may, it belongs to the superior and to the officials to attend to the failings of others; but indiscreet zeal would have every defect corrected at once. How much better it would be for each person to think of correcting himself, and of giving edification to others by an exact fulfilment of his own duty!"

II. To guard against the spirit of jealousy and pride; since this spirit once entering into the heart of a person living in a religious society, insensibly destroys union; on this point,

therefore, Sebastian used to say, "In private houses disgusts are often more easily endured, because they terminate in the person offended, who resigns himself without further comparison; whereas in religious communities displeasure is often fostered, inasmuch as the person receiving some correction, some mean employment, the denial of some liberty, and the like, immediately begins to compare himself with the others; and finding some one better treated than himself, he is angry with the superior, and says, 'Why is a liberty allowed to that person and not to me?' 'Why is such an office given to that youth and not to me who am his senior?' In these cases then subjects must be persuaded, that, without indulging any particular affection, the superior has just reasons for thus conducting himself; and if we remain abased and neglected, ours is the better lot."

III. Not to persist in private opinion. This vice is usually the most terrible enemy of the peace of the community. To live in tranquillity we must exercise ourselves in mortification, and yield to the authority of others. "This precept," he said, "becomes the most difficult to be fulfilled in the public conferences, in which the affairs of the congregation being the subject matter, it is an easy thing to persist in private opinion even in contempt of the sentiments of others; and this in religious communities is frequently the source of discords, so contrary to Christian charity." He therefore used to say to our novices, that they did not

know what it was to live in community till they had taken part in the public conferences; for there through the discrepancy of opinions and ideas it could be known who had zeal, and who only apparent virtue, who had profited by the years of probation, and who had lost his time in them.

IV. To repress internal antipathies and natural aversions, that they might not exhibit themselves externally to the prejudice of holy charity. On this subject, sometimes speaking of himself with one in whom he confided, he candidly confessed that for a long time he had felt a strong natural antipathy towards a father of great virtue, though with the help of the Lord he had so watched over himself that he did not think he had ever given him the least sign of it.

V. Finally, he said that to maintain the peace of the heart, and that of the community, it was necessary to be armed with constant patience. "It is impossible but that some one, even without his own fault, should in some circumstance, give us annoyance; and in this case, to avoid all contention, it is our part to dissemble, be silent, never to complain, nor ever to answer in pungent terms. A point to be particularly observed during the common recreation, and in the solving of doubts at table, where any one feeling himself piqued by some satirical reply, being unable on account of silence to defend himself and confute the contrary opinion, feels his mind more and more discomposed and inflamed."

CHAPTER III.

THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN ASSUMES, THROUGH OBEDIENCE, THE OFFICE OF CONFESSOR: HIS ZEAL AND ASSIDUITY IN EXERCISING THAT MINISTRY.

Although the Blessed Sebastian was furnished with every quality required by the sacred canons to form an excellent confessor, still in his first years he had not the courage to undertake that ministry which owing to his great humility appeared to him too arduous and difficult, but exercised it occasionally only, ever fearing to err to the prejudice of his own soul and that of another. "I became well acquainted, (thus is it found written with his own hand,) with the arduousness of the office of confessor; and therefore occasionally confessed some one in our inner chapel, not having the courage to take upon myself so holy a ministry in the public church. Although advised by many persons to do this, I too much feared to embrace so heavy a charge. I recommended myself to the prayers of many, and especially to those of the fathers of the congregation, which did not command me to do so, but compassionated me and bore with me, seeing my repugnance. I asked counsel of Father Poggi, of the Company of Jesus, who came to preach at Turin; and he encouraged me to confess all persons, and repeated this his sentiment several times by letter. I followed his

advice, beginning to place myself in the confessional in the church; and whatever may have been my object, which I intended to be the glory of God, the salvation of souls, and the observance of the institute, thanks to the Lord, I have not in practice encountered that difficulty which I had imagined at first that I should find." He who a little before timorously and rarely seated himself in the tribunal of penance, now re-assured, and unweariedly assiduous, saw himself almost every day surrounded in the church by an immense throng of penitents. On the days prescribed by the rule, he placed himself in the confessional at dawn of day, and quitted it at the hour of dinner; nor did he ever move from it but for the most urgent reasons. In the short intervals which he now and then had between one confession and another, he applied himself to his chaplet, or to the reading of some spiritual book. It was in this way that he gained an unhappy person, who through the suggestion of the devil had laid aside the habit of religion once so gladly embraced by him. This person one day entered into the church of the congregation, and observing Father Sebastian making his prayer in the confessional, having no penitent near him, he felt strongly moved to avail himself of the occasion, to remedy the bad state of his soul. He immediately hastened to the feet of Valfré, and such was the grief he conceived for his sins, through the paternal admonitions he received, and such the fruit he drew from them, that with tears in his eyes he at once returned

to his order, in which he lived virtuously till his death. This fact the servant of God used afterwards to relate to the other fathers of the congregation, with the view of animating them to remain in conformity with St. Philip's rule in the tribunal of penance, although they might have none to confess.

Nor was it in his own church merely that he thus devoted himself, but moreover, wheresoever he was called, without making any distinction of persons, noble or ignoble, learned or ignorant, rich or poor, fearing God, or defiled with a thousand iniquities, embracing all with the bowels of paternal love, with all long-suffering, removing their ignorance, clearing up their perplexing doubts by the rules of sound morality, above all encouraging those filled with shame to manifest to him infamous wounds of long years' standing and never confessed to others, with admirable grace tranquillising the scrupulous, usually so difficult of cure, and drawing sinners of every kind from the mire of iniquity to amendment of life, and by degrees to virtue and perfection. In addition to all this, the Lord had enriched him with the gift of knowing the secrets of hearts; whence he often clearly saw what the penitent had forgotten, or had even maliciously kept to himself. Vittoria Fornari, wife of the advocate Stephen Donzel, deposes in the process as follows: "When I was first beginning to go to the servant of God for confession, being one morning embarrassed in my confession, and not knowing how to lay open my conscience, he let me say a little; but

seeing that I did not know how to make myself clear, he said these words to me: 'Hearken; will you allow me to speak?' I instantly answered, 'Most willingly.' Then the servant of God began to discover to me all that had passed in my mind with greater clearness than I myself could have done after a long examen. It seemed as if he had in his hand a crystal with which he could see the most hidden recess of my heart; I remained full of admiration, seeing him thus enlightened by God to know the most secret sins of his penitents."

Luca Serra, a public notary of Costigliola in the diocese of Asti, about the year 1700, having come to Turin for the dispatch of his business, one morning came into our church to confession; having made his preparation, though he had never spoken with Father Sebastian, still, on account of the fame of sanctity in which the latter stood, he presented himself at his confessional. Kneeling before him, he was about to begin, when Sebastian said to him, "How do you go on with your brother?" "On hearing these words, I remained stupified and confused, (thus the same Serra attests) for, in truth, there was not a good understanding between me and my brother; but desiring to exculpate myself, I answered, that I did not wish him any ill, although I did not speak to him; and that he being younger than myself, it was his part to come to speak to me, and to humble himself. But the good father, not admitting these my reasons as just ones, promptly added, 'And

know you not what Jesus Christ says, that every one of the faithful, before approaching confession, ought to be reconciled with his neighbour, when he has any dispute or disagreement with him? Do you, therefore, go and be reconciled with your brother, and then return, and I will hear you willingly: but at this time, as things are, I could not give you absolution.' On hearing this, my esteem and veneration for him increased more and more."

These his gifts and virtues in the hearing of confessions and in the direction of souls, became so generally known, that persons of every class and condition flocked from all parts to his feet. But the multitude of the penitents never rendered him hasty, so as to seek to get through all in one morning by precipitating judgment in things so important; nor did the rank or the nobility of his penitents ever make him weak in correction or indulgent to vice. Utterly detached from all human respect, he sought to uproot sin and remove the immediate occasions of it, whoever might be the guilty person; speaking evangelical truth to all, and showing invincible firmness in refusing sacramental absolution when circumstances did not permit him to do otherwise. He never suffered the rich to live tranquilly in their hard-heartedness towards the poor, nor the great in the intrigues of their ambition, nor the worldly in pomp or in illicit connexions. To the most noble lady, to the prince, to the sovereign, just as to the lowest of the people, he knew how to speak with a genuine zeal.

Persuaded that many are lost through ignorance of the mysteries and duties of religion, every time a penitent of whose ability he was not certain came to his feet, he questioned him on the Christian doctrine and on the obligations of his own state, and willingly instructed him himself in regard to the tribunal of penance; or did the limits of his time not permit this, he sent him to charitable persons, who taught him what was necessary to be known, so that he might return sufficiently instructed; and the observance of this practice he very earnestly recommended to all confessors, seeing as he did its high importance, "not only," as he said, "to country persons, and to people of the lowest class, but even to the inhabitants of the town and those of wealthy family."

The Duke, Victorius Amadeus II., then king of Sardinia, chose Sebastian for his confessor. Dreading the charge, this humble father used every expedient to avoid loading himself with it; but at length, overcome by many entreaties, and counselled by the father deputies, he obeyed. Under his direction the magnanimous prince gave so many tokens of piety and beneficence, as to suffice to procure for him the brightest renown, not in his own states alone, but throughout Europe. The royal princesses also, his daughters, Maria Adelaide and Maria Louisa, desired to be penitents of Father Sebastian, and to the praise of pure truth it must be said, that they were mirrors of every virtue and of Christian perfection. Here in the archives

of the congregation are still jealously preserved the originals of some letters written by these ladies, in which with the greatest respect they entreat him at one time to go with greater frequency to explain to them the Christian doctrine, at another to hear their confessions, and at another to assist them in the novenas of the principal feasts of the Most Holy Virgin, by proposing to them some particular devotion. They also gave him a minute account of all the actions of the day, asking him as a favour to increase, diminish, or change them, according as he might think most suitable for their spiritual welfare. They constantly manifested to him a like humble subjection even till death, no less when under paternal authority than after their marriage, the one with the Duke of Burgundy, afterwards Dauphin of France, the other with the King of Spain, Philip V. Amid the grandeur of the two courts they continued to write with their own hands to their holy and enlightened director, that they might receive from him counsels of wisdom and of salvation. They both died very early, universally praised and lamented.

This apostolic man confessing and directing the royal family, the whole court, or nearly so, and the greater part of the nobility of Turin, while scarcely a moment of time seemed to remain to him, did not forget the poor who were his delight, having ever taken particular care to hear the lame, the blind, and the ragged of the most squalid description, among whom innumerable souls were gained to God. Nor did he ever

forget his own soul, holding it for certain, that to guide others well a confessor must be bent on his own perfection; whence he often repeated the words of St. Ignatius of Loyola: God usually operates as nature does, which in producing anything, makes use not only of general causes, but of a medium of the same species; wherefore he who would make others humble, must be humble himself; he who would make them patient must be patient, and so on. This same sentiment he laboured to put into the hearts of the priests whom by commission from the archbishop he examined in relation to confessions. "Let the confessor," he used to say to them, "give a good example to his penitents, particularly of that virtue which he wishes for in them; if he exhort to humility, let him be humble, if to devotion, let him be devout; for so doing, he will be more easily believed and obeyed. Woe to the confessors and preachers who teach the virtues without practising them! Woe to him, whoever he may be, who counsels, instructs, and directs others, if he be not virtuous himself; for he is subject to a more severe judgment; 'nolite plures magistri fieri, fratres mei, scientes quoniam majus judicium sumitis.' As to myself, I ought to stand in great fear if I do not true penance for my sins; for God will certainly chastise me with the utmost severity if I, who aim at sanctifying the souls of others, neglect the means of saving my own."

CHAPTER IV.

LABOURS OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN IN ANNOUNCING THE DIVINE WORD—THE MANNER IN WHICH HE ANNOUNCED IT—THE LIGHTS HE RECEIVED FROM GOD, TO ENABLE HIM TO ANNOUNCE IT WITH SUCCESS.

One of the principal obligations of the Congregation of the Oratory, is doubtless that of daily preaching the divine word in their own church. Of this St. Philip gave an example, and left the same duty to his sons. This sacred ministry the Blessed Sebastian Valfré fulfilled with all the virtues peculiar to apostolic men. He preached in the Church of the Congregation at least once a week, and generally every Friday, in addition to the instructions on Sundays, and the sermons he addressed to the brothers of the Oratory in the years during which he was their director, often moreover taking the place of any other father whom some accidental circumstance might have hindered from the discharge of his functions. He also preached in the poor-houses, prisons, hospitals, churches, oratories; in which, after having instructed the lowest class in the catechism, he usually gave some moral discourse or pious exhortation to all who were assembled. The monasteries too often heard his voice. Then again on occasion of novenas of the principal feasts, and during the exposition

of the most holy Sacrament for public adoration, so many were the entreaties addressed to him by the rectors of the churches and the superiors of the regulars, that condescending to all, he was frequently obliged to deliver two or three sermons in the same day, without reckoning the ordinary ones which he had to give to the court pages, the maids of honour, and the royal princesses. And with all this, it not appearing to him that he had provided so far as he ought for the wants of souls, he sometimes discoursed in the public piazzas, and especially in that called, "Del Vino," filled with unoccupied and idle persons not in the habit of frequenting the churches; at other times he went into the country in the district of the parish of St. Eusebius and elsewhere; and he was always listened to by the country people with reverential attention; nay, (as some testimonies in the process affirm,) as an angel of Paradise. This exercise which he began in his first years, was kept up by him till his death; nor even when eighty years of age; nor when decorated with splendid offices, as that of synodal examiner, council of the sacred inquisition, and royal confessor; nor when in the highest veneration with all persons, both on account of his great virtues and of his refusal of the archbishopric of Turin—did he ever omit instructing the people in the public streets; every corner and every portico serving him for a pulpit. Finally, in all the journeys he made to his native spot, as well as to the cities of Alba and Raconiggi, to the valleys of Lucerne

and to other places, his chief care ever was to publish the word of God, as if he had directed his course thither for that sole office, and not for other important affairs committed to his care.

The mode to which he adhered in his sermons, was ever conformed to the example and the spirit of St. Philip. Hence what he said was simple and sincere, supported by the sacred Scriptures and by the decisions of the holy fathers, while he strove more and more to adapt himself to the necessities and the capacity of the people, by a clear and easy method under the guidance of just reasoning; and although literary persons and learned priests flocked to hear his sermons, he nevertheless constantly preserved this style, which was agreeable to all persons. That however which gave force and energy to what he said, was undoubtedly his mental prayer and his sanctity of life; the effect of which was, that his words were universally received as so many oracles from heaven. He began his sermons in a tone so low and subdued that it seemed as if he were speaking to a few persons in a familiar assembly, but by degrees, as he warmed with the fire of divine love, he so much raised his voice that he terrified sinners, softened the hardest hearts, and led all to the practice of virtue and the hatred of sin. It was truly the spirit of the Lord which spoke in him; and hence through a single sermon were seen wonderful conversions, the renunciation of criminal connexions, reparations of injuries, and a solid

improvement of manners. It was this spirit of the Lord which likewise communicated to him in speaking supernatural gifts. Father Carlo Francesco Vazzolo, who died in the year 1722 in the Congregation of the Oratory at Tassano, at the age of seventy-three, with the fame of sanctity, in the year 1676, the fourth after his entrance into the said Congregation, was assailed by a malignant temptation of the devil, who excited in him a great aversion to the hearing of confessions; and this father being very humble, the enemy greatly aggravated the temptation, representing to him that in continuing any longer to exercise the office in question, he exposed himself to the serious and irreparable injury of his own soul and of those of his penitents. At the same period and in the same congregation there lived an intimate friend and former fellow-student of his, Father Giuseppe Colla, to whom, although sufficiently learned, still (why, I know not) preaching seemed so irksome that the very thought of it caused him bitter grief and most heavy affliction. It happened, as is customary with good priests, these two fathers communicated to each other their torments of spirit; but instead of receiving alleviation and comfort, the one being unable to encourage the other, they rendered the cross heavier and more insupportable, so that in order to get rid of it, finding no other means, they were deliberating about putting off the habit of St. Philip and abandoning the Oratory. God however in His mercy put it into their hearts not to execute

their project without first taking the advice of some person of prudence and experience; and the fame of the learning and holy life of the Blessed Sebastian being at that time universal, they determined to go to Turin to discover to him their interior, and to conform themselves to his judgment. They set out, and having reached the city, they went straight into the sacristy of the old church of St. Eusebius. Having heard that the servant of God was delivering a sermon, they ascended the gallery surrounding the high altar, and placed themselves in adoration of the most Blessed Sacrament, without seeing or being seen, and without having made known to any one the object of their journey. Scarcely had they knelt down when they heard Father Sebastian, in the conclusion of his discourse, raise his voice so powerfully, that it seemed like thunder; while directed towards them, it uttered the words "manete in vocatione in qua vocati estis," followed by a beautiful and luminous paraphrase on these words. Father Vazzolo remained awhile lost in astonishment; he held it as certain that what had been spoken, had been addressed to himself and his companion by the servant of God, through the especial movement of the Holy Spirit; wherefore turning to him, on his knees as he was, he said, "Do you hear? this is the answer which Father Valfré gives us." They, nevertheless, went to call upon him, and opening to him their minds they acquainted him with the pains they had experienced, and the resolution they had taken. The father having with

much kindness listened to them, gently admonished them, dismissing them with these words: "This very moment without any delay return to your congregation, and no longer think of anything but of serving the Lord for your whole remaining lives in the institute in which you are." "A subject of admiration!" (Father Vazzolo adds in his sworn attestation,) "one which ever renews my wonder, as often as I think of it, and which I never cease relating to our Fathers and to every one else. At the command of these few words of his all our difficulties instantly vanished as mists before the sun: we both remained in peace, and so steadily fixed in our vocation, that it never again entered our minds to quit the Oratory. Father Colla faithfully persevered in it as a good son of St. Philip till his death; and I who still survive my good friend, with the confusion of being so unlike him in virtue, affirm with all truth, that from the day on which Father Valfré spoke to us, I never had the smallest difficulty in hearing confessions, and I firmly believe that when on our going into the gallery he made that amplification on the manete in vocatione, &c. he already, in spirit, knew and saw our wants."

In further confirmation of the truth of the supernatural gifts possessed by Valfré, I add, that once preaching to a community of nuns against such persons as, overcome by a ruinous shame, conceal sins in sacramental confession, he said that the nun who was guilty of a like omission, (and he made particular mention of

it together with that of some others,) ought, without human respect, to conquer herself and confess it. At these words the guilty religious was disturbed and agitated; on the one hand, she was struck by the grace of God; but on the other, overcome by a too inveterate shame, she said within herself, "Oh! what will become of me! does he expect that I shall choose to confess it?" At the very moment in which she was thus speaking in her heart, the servant of God, with increased force and authority, no longer addressing the community, but herself singly, answered, "You must confess it, at what cost soever, and confound the devil." At these words, the nun more than ever disturbed between confusion and vexation, confirmed her design, saying resolutely, "Not to save my life will I confess it." On this Sebastian in a solemn and tremendous tone rejoined, "On the part of God, I command you to confess it." The religious, struck as by a thunder-bolt, and utterly confounded, at length determined to make a good confession to the confessor extraordinary. The prudent and discreet master of the spirit then encouraging her to do so, said, "Go early to whomsoever you will; but," added he, "remember that you are to repeat the confessions made since the time at which you first concealed sin." Then changing his aspect and tone, he began with all affability to speak of the divine mercy, encouraging the nun to confide in God; and she, on her part, hastened to accomplish what the enlightened preacher had enjoined in a manner so truly admirable.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S FAITH.

The acts, or peculiar effects of faith, the first of the three theological virtues, are on the one hand internal, of which the church forms no judgment, and on the other external, demonstrating the ardour, perfection, and magnitude of the internal. How full of life, and how unwavering was the faith of the Blessed Sebastian, cannot be better known than from the continual labours undertaken and endured by him in teaching the mysteries and truths of religion, in preserving Catholics from the infection of false doctrines, and in bringing back into the bosom of the Church heretics and infidels.

During the forty years in which he explained the Christian doctrine in the church of the congregation, neither the inconvenience of the hour in which this is usually done, nor the excessive heat of summer, owing to which the church (which was then very small) seemed a furnace, nor the importunity of the children who beset him, nor the frequency of his sicknesses, nor the ailments of his decrepit age, could ever detach him from this exercise, which he called his delight and his most beloved entertainment. In the vestibule of the house he often catechised those assembled there in a crowd to ask charity, teaching them, before his

charitable distribution, either to repeat some prayer, or how to approach the sacraments, or concerning some other main article of religion. Whenever he went through the city he was met in almost every street by poor persons, who seeing him at a distance ran to him as to their father; and he availing himself of a like occasion, with an imperturbable patience, instructed them on the very road. If circumstances did not permit him to stay as long as was necessary for their instruction, he asked them their names and abodes, and having obtained the information asked, he himself, in an hour of leisure, afterwards went, or sent others full of his own spirit, to fulfil the charitable office. Returning in the year 1709 from the vineyard della Regina in company with Father Gianfrancesco Giriodi, at the hour of noon, he found on the public road a poor old blind man, who asked an alms. The Blessed Sebastian stopped, and tenderly laying his hands on his head, asked him if he had that morning said his prayers. "I have something else to think of," answered the blind man. "And the principal matters of our holy faith," added the servant of God, "do you know them?" "Give me a small alms, and let the rest alone." "How long is it since you went to confession?" "I forget; but you, who are asking me all these things, who are you? Surely not Father Valfré." "Yes, I am Father Valfré." "Come then, Father, if you will have the goodness to hear me, I am ready to confess." Having then given him a sufficient

alms, Sebastian embraced him in token of confidence, and having conducted him to our oratory, he restored him to the grace of God.

Of cases such as these an infinite number might be adduced, it being his daily care not only to instruct the ignorant whom he found, but full of the charity of Jesus Christ, constantly to search them out himself. The inmates of the meanest huts, no less than those of all the holy places in the city, those of the hospitals, the boys and girls of the valleys of Lucerne converted to the holy faith, and occupying the house of reception destined for them, the girls in the poor-house of St. Paul, of the "Soccorso," and of the "Provvidenza," women of doubtful character shut up in a retreat, the catechumens "dello Spirito Santo," the pupils in monasteries, wounded soldiers and invalids sheltered in a hospital, the prisoners in the senatorial dungeons, men condemned to the galleys, vulgarly called the slaves of the citadel, were all instructed by the Blessed Sebastian in the truths of the faith. What were his labours in all these different places, may be inferred from the single testimony deposed in the process by the Marquis De Gasparo Morozzo: "I myself have seen the great labours of the servant of God in our hospital "della Carita," in this place, wherein at that time more than one thousand five hundred poor were assembled, I having the principal direction of them. He here laboured indefatigably among these people, that they might become instructed in the mysteries of our holy faith, and with so great fruit for their souls

that I have known many of them to arrive at a high degree of virtue."

In the year 1706, before Turin was besieged, a number of soldiers during their hours of freedom amused themselves in idleness beneath the porticoes of the "Piazza di S. Carlo." Sebastian, unable to endure seeing them in idleness, went at those times and collected them in the farm-yard of the Count della Villa's house, where, having a seat brought to him on the dung-hill which was in the yard, and placing his feet on the noisome mass beneath him, he explained the Christian doctrine to the troops, a part of whom were infected with heresy. He always ended the instruction with an alms.

In the year 1710, in the month of January, on a Sunday, a little before he fell ill of his last sickness, having as usual finished the Christian instruction in the church of the congregation, after taking breath awhile, he left the house in company with a young merchant, named Davide Giuliani di Raconiggi, and much in his confidence, with whom he went into the citadel in spite of the intense cold then prevailing. On his arrival all the before-mentioned slaves collected around him on a bastion, while he in the open air, standing on the ice and snow, began the catechising, which he continued for the space of three quarters of an hour, questioning first one and then another with great affection. After this he returned to the congregation without ever complaining of the cold, although he was at that time eighty years of age. His com-

panion, who was still young, depones in the process, that such was the severity of the north wind then blowing that he felt himself completely benumbed.

After the parish of St. Eusebius, (then extending some miles beyond the gate of the city,) was ceded to the congregation, although Sebastian was not rector of this parish, he always offered himself to catechise the country people of the region of Lingotto, going himself to seek for them, and to collect them in a small chapel; and these little journeys he used to make on foot, alike in the most intense cold of winter and in the burning heat of the dog-days.

Equal to his anxiety to instruct the faithful in religion, was his diligence in preserving them free from every error. Being unable, owing to the wars which were desolating Piedmont, to prevent the communication of Catholics with Protestants, he frequently represented to the sovereign, that it was his duty to command the allied heretics not to vilify the honour of the priesthood, not to profane the churches, nor to pervert the national troops, who, more than any other, were exposed to the danger of the heretical infection. He also took care that the regiments should be provided with learned and virtuous chaplains, in order that with sacerdotal courage they might maintain intact the holy faith, and promote the reverence due to the churches, priests, and the Roman Pontiff. With the chaplains themselves he held constant communication, and when informed by them of any

disorder, he promptly repaired it either by the favour of the archbishop or with the authority of the monarch. And yet in spite of all his efforts, heresy, that cursed weed scattered by the enemy amongst the choicest grain, continued to put forth its impious maxims, and had gone so far as even to insinuate itself into the circles and polished assemblies of the most distinguished among the nobility. At the view of the serpent-like advances of error, the apostolic man redoubled his zeal; and as the concourse of those who came to hear his sermons was still very great, so from the pulpit, with voice lifted up, he warmly recommended to the Catholics to put themselves on their guard against the seduction at hand; and exciting the heretics, (some of whom were also present as auditors,) to come to him in his own room with their reasons, he said, "Without going to disseminate errors in parties of ladies, come to me, and with the help of God I shall be able to answer you." Three of the chief heretics present when these words were uttered determined to go to combat him; and having fixed on the day of attack, and studied the strongest of their reasons, they proceeded to his room. They were received with the utmost politeness, and one after another they entered into argument with him. The first being confounded, the second rose, and he too being overcome, the third disputed with a like result. All three being overthrown by his invincible replies, the Blessed Father by mild and affectionate expedients induced them to embrace the Catholic faith,

and in taking leave of them he gave to each Father Segneri's work, "L'incredulo senza scusa."

Numberless were those who through his exertions embraced our most holy religion. In 1685 the inhabitants of Turin being obliged to come to arms with the heretics of the valleys of Pinerolo, for having committed offences against the state, both sides having fiercely combated, more than a thousand of the rebels fell into our power, and a great number of them were shut up in the citadel of Turin. The zeal of Sebastian was kindled in their favour; he was seen to go about and studiously to endeavour to aid the unfortunate men both in body and soul. He provided them with everything they could want; he often let them go into the open air; he mildly consoled them; and having gained the minds of all, he made them conscious of the error in which they were, and had the consolation of bringing back very many to the truths of the Catholic Church. He also converted too apostates, a priest, that is, who, exercising the functions of rector in a province of Germany, had been perverted by heretics, and a regular, who, having abandoned his institute, in order to live licentiously, was staying in Switzerland. Enrolled in the same regiment, both came to Turin in the rank of officers, and, God so willing, happening to come into conversation with Father Sebastian, they remained, through the divine grace, so soul-stricken, that entering into themselves they threw themselves weeping at his feet; and he succeeded, after having confessed

them and absolved them from the censures incurred, in restoring the one to his parish, and the other to his institute, from which time both continued to live in a manner worthy of imitation and of admiration.

Although this sagacious observer employed, as we have said, all possible care, every expedient and contrivance, to keep the Catholics at a distance from heresy, this monster nevertheless skilfully contrived to insinuate itself into a hospital of ours in this place, where under colour of virtue and religion it miserably deceived some young girls. The thing was discovered by the illustrious lady, Vittoria Fornari Donzel, a penitent of the Blessed Father, who going one day into the house in question, met with one of these girls who was trembling very much. Thinking that the child was attacked by some disease, the lady turned to the directress who accompanied her, saying with some gesture of compassion, "Oh poor child, what sad disorder has she?" But the superior, who very well knew whence the tremor arose, and who was herself miserably misled, answered, "This disorder merits not compassion, but envy: it is not every one who can have it." The lady not understanding the meaning of these words, passed on; but seeing other girls convulsed in the same way, wonder and amazement were added to compassion, and this wonder and amazement increased beyond measure when she had to hear from the directress herself, that this affection was no disease, but a special grace from God, and one she desired

for all her children. The pious lady utterly perplexed, and not knowing what to do, thought it best to make Father Sebastian acquainted with the circumstance, who knowing that this was the error of the "Quakers," immediately applied prompt and efficacious remedies; whence happily, he succeeded in healing so malignant a wound, and in causing the memory of it to be for ever lost in that place.

With like zeal he laboured for the conversion of the Jews, many of whom came through him to the true faith, he himself never sparing any pains were it even for the good of one only. A catechumen had laid aside the resolution she had made of becoming a Christian, and the Inquisitor of the Holy Office, unable to retain her, had given her the liberty of returning to her synagogue. This coming to the knowledge of Sebastian, he flew to the retreat "dello Santo Spirito," where the woman still was, and having reached the place, without terrifying her by threats, or administering reproof, he mildly solicited her, and with her all present, to repeat with him a Paternoster. All having knelt down and said the short prayer, he approached the woman and asked her if she would be a Christian. "Yes, Father," she replied, "very willingly;" and without further changings or doubtings, she embraced our holy religion, in which she died at a great age, with clear marks of constancy and of Christian virtue.

Exceedingly great was the good which he did in the valleys of Lucerne. The number of Ca-

tholics there being by his means much increased, it was necessary to provide them with new pastors, to erect new churches, and to restore or enlarge the old ones, as well as to furnish all with sacred vessels. All these provisions however could not be made unless some one went to visit the place in question, making himself acquainted with the wants of each. A commission of this nature was given by the sovereign to the servant of God, who gladly fulfilled it with great diligence and promptitude. He remained eight days in the country without resting anywhere; but continually passing through the valleys and over the mountains, he animated the faithful, preached, and distributed alms. He at the same time appointed public prayers, increased the devotion to the Most Holy Virgin, and left behind him the ever-enduring memory of his faith and zeal. On his return, having rendered an account of what he had observed, he was fully provided with every thing; the sacred pastors were assigned, churches were restored and erected, and divine worship being protected, copies of the Catholic catechism were, (as he wished,) everywhere distributed.

CHAPTER VI.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S HOPE AND CONFIDENCE IN GOD.

The virtue of hope founded on the omnipotence and mercy of God, has for its ultimate object the attainment of eternal life, which has

been promised to us through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ, and our own co-operation. Continually animated by this celestial virtue, the Blessed Sebastian willingly surmounted the greatest difficulties, overcame with intrepid courage the most powerful obstacles threatening to thwart all his holy undertakings, without ever manifesting either pusillanimity or annoyance. As he was ascending a long and very inconvenient staircase in order to confess some one who was sick, some persons seeing him suffer very much, were compassionating him; but the patient and zealous man, with a tranquil and cheerful countenance, answered, "I do not mind it, no, it is not irksome to me to mount so high, since I hope one day by the mercy of God, that I shall mount still higher to go into Paradise." To one of his relations who was congratulating him on the honours he was receiving throughout Turin, the blessed man candidly answered that such things did not move him at all, because all he aimed at was the glory of Paradise, which some time or other (and of this he had firm hope) Almighty God would through His mercy grant to him.

This most lively hope was accompanied with a profound dread of the Divine judgments, the consideration of which sometimes filled him with the most pungent sufferings, as appears from one of his manuscripts: "I have felt in my interior," thus he explains himself, "an anguish that has pierced my soul. This originated in an obscurity of mind in which I could find no

relief: it seemed to me that my salvation was lost irrecoverably, nor could I find any means of issuing from this obscurity; I would have given a whole world to have a little light through which it had been granted me to know what I must do to accomplish the will of God; nor did I know with whom to advise, crosses of this nature not being so easily understood by him who has not experienced them. I was inwardly convulsed through fear of damning myself; but I nevertheless turned to the Divine mercy, protesting that even had I been able to know with certainty that I was abandoned by it, I would still have hoped in it." In the combat described is seen not only his internal martyrdom, but his generous confidence also. He sighed, he groaned, and this happened to other saints likewise; but in the very time in which he said he was as if abandoned by God, he declared that he would hope for relief and aid from God alone; and to Him he at once had recourse, and in Him he found spiritual comfort, even amid affliction of conscience, the assaults of the evil spirit, obscurities, desolations, and the most terrible abandonments. Nor was it for a short season that an affliction so cruel lasted, but, and this is most wonderful, he was from time to time tormented by it for more than forty years. Of this his tribulation he wrote in October, 1699, to Cardinal Colloredo, to whom he opened his mind as to an intimate friend: "I deposit in the heart of your Eminence," these are his own words, "what is passing in mine.

Death is unwelcome to me, not because my heart is attached to anything on this earth, no, for by the grace of God it seems to me that I have detached it from everything; but because I dwell on that moment on which an eternity depends, well knowing that I shall not be judged according to the judgment of the world, which sees nothing but things apparent, but according to that of God, who sees the most hidden also. I endeavour in my actions to avoid giving any hinderance to those who may observe me, but still I am sometimes not so attentive and circumspect as that my neighbours can always be edified by me. This it is which torments and afflicts me. At this time I know not how to find a place in which I am so much consoled as at the sacred altar: there, after having made holy communion, I would gladly meet death. From all this your Eminence may conceive the need in which I find myself of the prayers of others: may you then pray for me, and know that you have great interest in my becoming good, on account of the frequent remembrances I make of you to God. In order to employ every means of moderating this my fear, I have resolved to be a little more devout towards our most amiable and most pure Virgin Mary, and I hope to succeed in retaining that fear alone by which salvation is effected, and which fears God with filial love." This fear of the incomprehensible judgment of God went so far as to make him lose his rest and deranging his physical system; it more than once obliged him to take

to his bed oppressed by serious indisposition. In one of these sicknesses, Father Riccardi, who attended on him while ill, observed that contrary to what was usual with him, he gave frequent signs of some heavy trouble. Unable to attribute this to the discomfort of disease, having always seen him patiently resigned in bearing it, he began to doubt if it did not indicate distress of mind; whence, during Sebastian's convalescence, conversing one day familiarly with him, he asked him whence proceeded the sighs and agitations which had been so frequently observable in the course of his illness. Then the servant of God, to gratify the desire of his friend, answered, "The cause of my inquietude and affliction was this: I found myself internally so possessed by the thought of eternity, and by the dread of the account of my life I had to give to God, that I could find no repose." Another time, finding himself dangerously ill and seeing near him Father Giandomenico Perardi, who was in extreme distress at the sight of his severe malady, turning to him, he said without the least disturbance, "The physicians do not know that my sickness comes from the thought of having to give an account to God: I become tranquil and improve only when I think of the Most Blessed Virgin and of St. Joseph the protector of a good death." Another time he said he felt a great comfort in calling to mind the words, "Qui Mariam absolvisti, et latronem exaudisti, mihi quoque spem dedisti."

In the midst of all this suffering he ever pre-

served a joyous hilarity. During one of the above-mentioned illnesses Father Presset, of the Congregation of the Clerks Regular of St. Paul, having entered his chamber to pay him a visit, had no sooner seen him in his bed with his usual modest, serene, and pleasing expression of countenance, than he could not help saying to one of our congregation who accompanied him, "Behold there the face of a predestinated one!" This same serenity of countenance was the cause of every one's having recourse to him for comfort and counsel; and he himself, long instructed by his own experience, proved an excellent comforter and a perfect master of souls tempted to distrust of their eternal salvation. What follows was written by him to a nun oppressed by a like torment: "Drive away that excessive dread of offending God; guide yourself by His holy fear and holy love; constantly endeavour to calm your inquietudes, they will otherwise make you lose time by keeping your mind in continual suspense. Be observant, and leave the rest to God, with whose aid the work is begun, carried on, and perfected. Do what you can on your own part, and doubt not. Know that no one in the world ever taught that there is sin where the will does not consent; wherefore take courage, and this will help you to bear your troubles more cheerfully." Another time he wrote to the same person, together with a second who was in fear of damnation: "If the temptation render you more humble and more confident in God, such fear will help you; but if this temptation

render you pusillanimous and distrustful, put it away, for it is not good for you. Let each of you exercise herself in humility of heart and in charity, and not doubt of her salvation." To conclude, he thus wrote to another in similar circumstances: "Afflictions are the food most grateful to the souls which aspire to please Jesus Christ. Learn to receive crosses with resignation and to bear them with patience, for they are as tempests at sea, that seem ready to submerge the vessel, which, by the very force of the waves, is borne to the shore. To live without a cross is too heavy a cross. Speculate not too much on useless and tormenting reflections; exercise yourselves in humility, obedience, mortification, and be at rest."

CHAPTER VII.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S CHARITY AND LOVE OF GOD.

The charity of God diffused in the heart of the Blessed Sebastian manifested itself outwardly in so vehement a manner, that, like his father St. Philip, he was very often constrained to open his breast and lay himself on his mean couch, as if oppressed by deadly faintness, struggling amid sighs and the most tender aspirations towards God. At other times the heavenly flame with which he burned discovered itself in his countenance, in his voice, in his private conversations

with others, and also in his public discourses, credible witnesses having observed him, now with his face white as the snow, now with eyes radiant as stars, and often bathed in a flood of tears, which however he strove by all possible methods to conceal. These sensible ardours were evident testimonies of a soul utterly detached from the things of the world and entirely wrapt in the highest Good. "I feel myself so disgusted," (he himself thus writes,) "with the things of the world, that I should not like to see myself there again even in a picture. Every conversation in which there is frivolity annoys me; the mention of feastings horrifies me; I should like to have no longer anything to do but to speak of God and of things leading to God. I regret that among even spiritual persons little account is sometimes made of perfection; for myself I should like to be continually with some one who might aid me in serving God and in loving Him.....Considering the state of my soul, whether it has any attachment which, supposing I were now to die, would cause me sorrow, it appears to me that I have none such.....O my God! when shall it be that I am entirely yours in love unmixed?"

In proportion as the love of God burns within a soul, does the displeasure at seeing others offend Him increase there also. Hence he was often heard to say, "The world is nothing to me; the loss of relations whom I nevertheless love, gives me little uneasiness, so that, did I hear that not one remained to me, I think I should

not be disquieted; one thing alone torments me, and that is, the fear lest God be offended; let possessions, let life pass away, provided God be not offended." He kept not this salutary fear hidden within himself, but manifested it on every occasion. Father Agostino Ainesio of our congregation attested in the process, that having one day gone to him to communicate to him some trouble that greatly tormented him, the servant of God having heard the causes of his affliction answered with all peace, "This is not sin; sin is the only evil which should give us annoyance, all the rest is nothing." Hence it was, that when he saw or heard any one who by deeds or words was offending God, his face became on fire, and he shuddered through the horror he felt; he was sometimes so distressed that he became ill through his affliction. On this subject Count Pietro Paolo Ricca, his physician, relates as follows: "About four years before the death of Father Valfré, going as the ordinary physician of the congregation to visit him on an occasion in which he found himself suffering under some paroxysm, and finding myself alone with him, he told me in confidence with expressions of peculiar regret, that he should not be cured of that indisposition unless his heart were set at rest; that it was in a state of mortal agony from his having heard of the terrible disorders which had occurred in a religious community in Piedmont."

Even of venial sin he had a profound abhorrence, and endeavoured to excite a horror of

it in those under his direction. His nephew, Marcantonio, attests in the process, that in the first year in which he came to Turin, his uncle one day having convicted him of lying, gave him a powerful admonition, which he terminated by telling him that if he ever again fell into a like fault, he would never again let him set foot in his room. He often spoke on this subject with the young men of our congregation, showing them by facts, that the greater part of the grievous faults of Christians have had their origin in similar negligence; and he added the following very important reflection: "The devil sometimes takes more pleasure in making a man who fears God fall venially, than a worldly man mortally; because as to the latter, being able to make him fall whenever he pleases, he does not give himself so much concern; whereas, in regard to the former, he makes use of all his wiles, that he may dispose him to grievous falls; or when after all he cannot accomplish this, he takes delight in retarding the glory of Paradise by the pains of purgatory."

Equally opposed to the love of God is tepidity, that spiritual infirmity which makes the soul languid in well-doing, just as a slow fever parches by degrees the most robust frames. Hence in order that every regular might be an exact observer of the rules, and might shun a vice so pernicious, Sebastian, who was all love and charity, was accustomed to say, that "In religious communities the tepid are the most troublesome to superiors, inasmuch as not failing in

matters of moment, they can neither be dismissed nor severely reproved; and yet by doing everything distractedly, languidly, and as if by compulsion, they do not afford, as they ought to do, either example or edification to the rest. The holy fathers esteem it to be almost a miracle for the tepid to become fervent; the reason of the so little advance on the part of the tepid religious is that he thinks he does enough by living in the grace of God, not firmly resolving to do all the good he can; and this is a most serious self-deception, since he by degrees loses devotion, and often comes at length to be the cause of the fall of the other religious. Predestination is to be accomplished according to the mode predetermined by God; but when any one falls in this or that instance, although not very seriously, such ill correspondence may offend God, so that He may afterwards withhold His divine aids when we most need them." A young man, on taking the monastic habit, having begged the Blessed Sebastian to give him some good suggestion for keeping clear of a like pestilence, he satisfied the holy request by an answer (contrary to his custom,) so long, that it may be considered rather as a treatise than as a mere letter. It will be sufficient to give it here in abridgment, adducing the principal heads, that is, the marks of tepidity, the dangers it brings with it, and the remedies most efficacious in its cure. The marks of tepidity are, to attach no importance to the counsels and admonitions of superiors and spiritual fathers,

and under studied pretexts to seek every mode of making the latter condescend to our desires. Frequently to change devout books, and to grow weary of those already read, and of meditations already made. To consider ourselves as capable of conducting ourselves in the best possible manner, without help from others. To avoid occupations in accordance with our institute and office, that we may apply to those suiting our inclination. Frequently to withhold ourselves from community acts without a solid reason. To call to mind the conveniences left behind in the world, saying that we were better off in the house of our parents, and were equally able to save our souls there. To repeat on every occasion that we have now for many years worn the religious habit, served the monastery, and laboured for the benefit of the community. All which expressions most evidently show want of fervour; for he who truly loves God, the more he has laboured, the more he holds himself bound to labour, and the greater the number of the years of his religious life, the greater is his study to come to perfection, knowing as he does, that in proportion as the favours of Heaven increase, so ought our grateful correspondence to increase likewise.

The dangers tepidity brings with it are, to lose the merits already acquired in former times of fervour. To be abandoned by God, and consequently to fall grievously. To die miserably in a state of languor.

Finally, the Blessed Sebastian proposes for

the extirpation of this evil two remedies only, and they are these; that the tepid person earnestly entreat the Lord to give him strength to escape from a state so deplorable; and that, on his own part, he labour zealously, efficaciously resolving on a change which would be so full of glory to God, so beneficial to himself, and so exemplary for others.

CHAPTER VIII.

OF THE VIRTUE OF RELIGION IN THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN.

The virtue of religion has, according to the teaching of St. Thomas, the nearest affinity to the theological virtues; and for this reason we now treat of that particular devotion which the Blessed Sebastian professed to the most august sacrament of the altar, to the passion of our Divine Redeemer, to the most Holy Virgin, the Mother of God, and to the angels and saints his protectors, all which belongs to the virtue of religion. He every morning occupied himself for a long time in the adoration of the most holy Sacrament; and when the employments of the sacred ministry did not permit this, he did at night what he had not been able to do in the day. He repeated his visits of adoration, on going out of the house and on returning to it; he also did the same as a recreation after dinner and after supper; a most pious usage, which introduced

by his example, is still observed by the congregation. He every day went to the "Quarantore," and he had himself registered in the society of the "Perpetual Adoration," which had been newly instituted in the church of Corpus Domini, taking upon himself many hours for every month, and those the most inconvenient. Moreover, in this pious society he caused many persons even amongst the nobility to be registered, desiring to infuse into all the most ardent devotion to a sacrament in which God has poured forth all the treasures of His grace.

In his administration of the holy communion to the faithful, it would be impossible to express the angelic modesty which beamed forth in his countenance, or the solemnity and tenderness with which he touched the adorable body of Jesus Christ; being in the greatest degree distressed when even without any fault anything occurred contrary to the dignity of so august a sacrament, and ever most watchful to prevent any voluntary and scandalous outrage. He could not bear to see women indecorously habited approach the eucharistic table, in opposition to the decrees of so many sacred councils and orders of the Church, in conformity with which he corrected like faults most unsparingly. One morning, as he was communicating the people, a young lady of noble birth approached the sacred table. The servant of God seeing that her dress was far from modest, was seized with horror, and having many times passed before her without communicating her, was already going up to the altar to replace

there the sacred ciborium; but being informed by the clerk that the lady, aware of the indecorum, had completely enveloped herself, he turned back and communicated her.

Whatever pertains to the exterior dignity of the most holy sacrament was an object of his zeal; he desired that the altar linen should be ever kept clean, and the sacred vessels polished, the lamps ever lighted, and the altars decently adorned; nor could he endure that any one should lean with his elbow, or place his hat upon the latter. He gave a notable example of his recollection and reverence in the presence of Jesus Christ, on an occasion on which our sovereign having come with a numerous retinue to our church, on the feast of St. Philip, the Blessed Sebastian, in surplice and stole, went with the other fathers to receive him at the door, and to offer him holy water. The sovereign on coming up to him, wished to say a few words in confidence; but Sebastian, intent on the sacred rite which, as superior, it was his office to perform, remained as if stupid, not answering a word. This circumstance gave great edification, every one being aware that it proceeded solely from the high reverence he had for the house of God.

From what has hitherto been said it is easy to imagine what must have been his attention and fervour in the celebration of the divine sacrifice. He was not too long in this most holy function, concealing, as far as he could, the ardour of his spirit and the interior visitations of the Lord; but his internal recollection was so

manifest in his external composure, that it excited the devotion of those around. To know with what purity of heart and fervour of spirit he performed this sacred function, we have only to reflect, that in all the sufferings of his mind, and in the long and terrible trials he sustained through his dread of the divine justice, his most secure asylum was a recurrence to the sacred altar, thus manifesting that then only, when he had received the most holy Body of Jesus Christ, did he feel himself filled with celestial comfort, and free from the terror of death. Nor was it his desire that this purity of heart and fervour of spirit should merely precede and accompany the tremendous sacrifice; but that it should be seen in every action of his life; and he said that in order to live thus, "a priest has but to remember that he every day celebrates the holy mass." When, on returning from the altar into the sacristy, he was preparing to make his thanksgiving, he took no thought of those who might be waiting for him, although frequently the most noble cavaliers had come thither to speak to him on matters of the utmost importance. He himself often served another mass, and this he did even in the decrepitude of age; but when the day was a festival, or one appointed for confessions, he had no sooner returned thanks than he went away to the confessional. He liked that this practice should be observed by the other fathers of the congregation also.

During Holy Week, his mass was somewhat long on those days on which is read the dolorous

passion of Jesus Christ, his recitation of that sacred story being frequently interrupted by sighs and tears: sure tokens of his most fervent devotion. On the morning of Good Friday, on his knees before the altar on which was placed the most holy sacrament, he was accustomed to read in a raised and distinct tone the meditation on the passion of the Lord, accompanying it with so much feeling that every one was moved to tenderness. The cavalier, Carlo Raimondi, steward of the household of the most serene Prince of Carignano, one morning begged the servant of God to teach him the mode of making mental prayer. To gratify this gentleman, who was much in his confidence, Sebastian instantly taking a book that lay near, began to read with great deliberation the meditation on the passion of Jesus Christ, saying, "This, my Lord steward, this is what you must do:" but tears coming into his eyes, after having read a few lines, being unable to repress the sensibility of his heart, he closed the book, and for that day could go no further. He not only very frequently meditated on the life, passion, and death of our Saviour, but very willingly spoke of them; and on this account he used often to go to the sacred retreat of the Camaldolese, (now destroyed,) in the neighbourhood of the city, there to converse on like subjects with the good fathers. This his devotion rendered him as long as he lived, solicitous to promote the veneration and adoration of the most holy Winding-sheet, never ceasing to recommend to the people to go to venerate it,

as he himself and his penitents did, especially on all the Fridays of the year. In 1694, when the change of the veils in which the holy Winding-sheet is wrapped was to be made, the sovereign desired that Father Valfré should be one of the very few in whose presence a function so sacred should be executed. The precious relic being taken out with great ceremony, and a rent being found near the extremity, Valfré was appointed to repair it. In this action, as indeed during the whole three hours in which the relic was presented to the devotion of all the people, Sebastian, without once moving his lips, did nothing but weep: an evident mark of his contemplation of the dolorous mysteries, which, at the sight of the object before him, returned to his mind.

He also entertained a singular affection and devotion towards the most Holy Virgin Mother of God, who was ever considered by St. Philip to be the foundress of the Congregation of the Oratory. Hence, beside the duties common to all the faithful, he held himself strictly obliged to particular sentiments of reverence and love towards her. He punctually followed the advice of St. Bernard, who desires that in our troubles, in our doubts, in every spiritual and temporal need, our recourse to Mary may be prompt and assiduous, so that her most amiable name may be ever on our lips and in our hearts. Such was constantly the practice of the Blessed Sebastian, whether in his more arduous undertakings or in his more ordinary offices. When he wrote

to a person of authority on some affair of moment, having finished his letter, before sending it away, he was accustomed to prostrate himself before her image and devoutly to present it to her, begging her maternal benediction. In going out of his room he took leave of Mary; and usually going down to the porter's lodge by a stair-case, at the head of which he had placed a picture of this his most dear and most powerful advocate, in passing before it he bowed with head uncovered, and reverently and humbly kissed her holy feet; and this he did with so much assiduity and affection, that the picture was almost effaced in that part. He excited like pious sentiments in the minds of all whom he directed, or who conversed with him. The first thing he recommended to the novices on their entrance into the congregation, was devotion to the most holy Virgin; and afterwards continued to urge them to fly with confidence to her patronage, to prepare themselves by novenas and mortifications for all her festivals, and especially for those of the Conception and Annunciation; he sent them every Saturday to venerate her in her sanctuary, "della Consolata;" in short, he never omitted to exalt the glory, and everywhere increase the adoration of this most loving Mother. In the poor-houses, hospitals, monasteries, and in all churches in which he preached, his discourse never ended without his tenderly speaking of Mary, nor without his promoting some devotion towards her, more especially that of her rosary. As in private, so in public dangers, she was ever

to the fervent Sebastian the potent shield of defence. In 1706, Turin being besieged by the French, amid the general dismay, or rather despair of all persons, our Blessed Sebastian, full of the most lively faith, was seen passing quickly through every part of the city, animating the people to confide in the protection of the most holy Mary, who would assuredly save them. "Have recourse to the Virgin," said he; "diligently visit her sanctuary 'della Consolata;' invoke this good mother in your distress, and you will certainly be heard." His words were universally considered to be a certain sign that the favour would be granted. The concourse of every class of citizens to that church increased day and night; and although by its position it was exposed more than any other to the fire of the enemy's artillery, no one in it was ever injured. A glorious victory was obtained through the assistance and bravery of Prince Eugene of Savoy, as is sufficiently known from history; the siege was raised, the hostile army overcome and scattered, and Victorius Amadeus with the prince his cousin entered triumphantly into his capital on the evening of the 7th of September. A success so marvellous merited a solemn and memorable thanksgiving. The sovereign wished to hear the opinion of Valfré, who in a letter of the 13th of February, 1707, thus answers him: "Your Royal Highness condescends to inquire of me concerning the manner in which public thanks are to be rendered to God for the victory obtained over the French army; and I doing myself the

honour of promptly obeying, immediately make answer, that the miraculous deliverance having been obtained by the intercession of the Most Blessed Virgin Mary, the thanksgiving should be directed to her. Wherefore as often as your Highness may think fit, the Feasts of the Nativity, Annunciation, and Immaculate Conception, might be solemnized with magnificence and splendour. The first, because in the vigil the siege was raised; the second, because Turin was ever devoted to it; the third, for reasons well known to your Highness. In each of these three days, or at least in one, it would seem to me that there should be public service, general communion, and a devout procession. A solemnity so consoling and of so joyful a character, should also be marked by the liberation from the public prisons of those unhappy persons who can in any way merit the compassion of the sovereign, by the relief of your subjects from some burden, and by a liberal distribution of alms to the poor, especially to those of the Hospital 'della Carita.' To the most holy Mary should be dedicated the church which your Highness is by vow obliged to build. All this being done, it is certain (I most firmly believe) that God will continue in a particular manner to protect this city; and in all persons will the memory of the favour received be vividly preserved," &c. These things the Blessed Sebastian proposed to our prince, who being most religious and noble-hearted, desired that not one but all of them should be done in that year; subsequently or-

daining by a solemn decree, that a devout procession should be for ever made on the day of the Nativity.

After having written of the devotion of the Blessed Sebastian to our most Blessed Lady, we must not be silent on that which he had to St. Philip Neri. He never let a day pass without showing him respect, nor without visiting him at his altar. In the novena preceding his feast he with singular fervour redoubled his prayers, alms, penances; but persuaded that to imitate his virtues would be the best way of pleasing the saint, he endeavoured to copy him in them; and he succeeded to such an extent that in his very countenance, as well as in his actions, he exceedingly resembled him; hence he was known by many, not under the name of Father Sebastian, but of that of St. Philip of Turin. His devotion was still more plainly seen when the saint in the April of 1695 was elected as co-protector of Turin, that he might intercede with God for the removal of those terrible evils which seemed to be hanging over the whole state. After this election, Sebastian, in order to augment in all persons devotion and affection to St. Philip, caused a solemn novena to be performed, in which the court, the city authorities, the archbishop, the canons of the metropolitan church, the regular orders, the pious confraternities, and an extraordinary concourse of citizens, joined. On this occasion moreover, he founded at Ciriè, in honour of St. Philip, a confraternity of priests and laymen; and at Car-

magnola and Mondovi, he inspired all with a great love for this saint and a sure confidence in him.

The feast of St. Francesca Romana was celebrated by him with particular fervour, because he had on that day come into the world in the bosom of the holy Church, and had on that same day received holy baptism. He considered as his special protectors St. Sebastian, St. Francis of Sales, the Blessed Amadeus, and St. Charles Borromeo. He never forgot his guardian angel, invoking him in all his wants, and in the beginning of every action. One of the principal things he recommended to the novices, was this very practice; namely, that they should often have recourse to their guardian angel, as to the most faithful and powerful friend, laying open to him all their troubles: nay, he even encouraged them to do this in a writing, in the form of a supplication; and placing this writing with fervour and confidence beneath the image of the angel, as if consigning it into his hands, to feel secure of being heard in their requests.

Towards the souls in purgatory his tenderness was extreme. He used his influence with all persons to induce them to aid these souls by prayers, alms, and acts of mortification. He wrote to Father Carlo Rissignoli, a Jesuit, to beg him to write some little work for their benefit; and Rossignoli, wishing to gratify his pious desire, published a book having for its title, "The Wonders of God in the Souls in Purgatory." Through the great compassion that he felt for

these souls, he applied to them not only all the good he did, but also all the suffrages that might be made for him after death. "The merit which I acquire, (these are his own words,) from the little good I do, and all the suffrages which I hope after death to obtain from my friends, relations, penitents, and from all the members of my congregation, I now for ever apply to the souls in purgatory; in virtue of which suffrages, those in the first place to whom through any obligation of justice or piety I may owe them, will be able to have some relief; and then the rest according to the degrees and the order of charity, in the most ample and beneficial manner possible. But should any one wonder at this my renunciation in that I voluntarily deprive myself of that of which I shall have great need, let him know that with all my renunciation I am most certain of having more help than others; since the blessed souls liberated from that prison by means of renounced suffrages will pray to God for me; and thus the charity which I shall have exercised towards them will turn to my own greater good and relief." But let this suffice, for time would fail did we seek to recount all the particular devotions of our Blessed Sebastian.

CHAPTER IX.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S EXERCISE OF PRAYER.

From all we have said in the preceding chapter, it clearly appears that, with the exception of the time in which he had to labour for the good of his neighbour, Sebastian (in this too following the example of St. Philip) passed the rest of his life in the continued exercise of prayer. According to our institute we are all to meet together every evening in the public oratory to make holy meditation. Sebastian was ever to be found there, nor were he abroad did pouring rain or snow ever prevent him from returning at the appointed hour. It is also worthy of great admiration, that neither on account of advanced age nor of bodily indisposition would he ever dispense himself from the usage introduced of kneeling during the act in question on the bare pavement, although to those to whom it is necessary leaning and sitting down are readily conceded; and he himself in the time in which he was superior showed himself in this point most condescending towards all. In his sicknesses, when unable to stir from his bed, he had the points of the meditation read to him by the infirmarian, who having finished reading and drawn the curtains was for a while to leave him alone, but instead of this he often stood apart in concealment, listening to the holy aspirations

from the heart of the blessed man, who full of fervour, and not thinking he was heard, was from time to time uttering them aloud to God. Every year suspending so far as was possible the course of his labours, he was accustomed to pass some days in making the spiritual exercises, which he desired that all Christians should make, holding it as certain that some fruit is always derived from this practice; it was likewise his sentiment that persons living in community should even in holy exercises continue the discharge of the offices assigned to them, observing however a rigorous silence, not speaking without necessity. "Because," said he, "it is thus rendered easy to each person to perform the exercises, the office of one not falling upon another, and a method is introduced of fulfilling his peculiar duty or his rule in the midst of holy recollection." The fruit which he himself reaped from his meditations was the abiding union of his mind with God, so that in every one of his works it was evident that he was entirely occupied in and intent upon tasting and relishing the sweets of His love; sweets, which, as we have seen, Almighty God interspersed with the serverest trials of desolation, distrust and apprehension. It was owing to this sacred union, that in passing through Turin and being met and saluted by the most noble personages, it very frequently happened that he would neither have returned the salute nor been aware of it, had not his companion been prompt in calling his attention to it.

The use of ejaculations was continual with him. "God be praised," he very often repeated; and concentrating in few words the acts of the theological virtues, he would say, "I believe in Thee, my God; I hope in Thee, my God; I love Thee, my God; I unite myself to Thee, my Jesus; to Thee I recommend myself with my whole heart." At other times he was heard to exclaim aloud, "O Love, O Love! O my Delight! When shall it be that these bonds break asunder, and that I am permitted to fly away and unite myself to Thee, my only Good!" By these aspirations or loving ejaculations which can be made at all times and in all places, deficiency in all other prayers may, according to St. Francis of Sales, be supplied, though all other prayers cannot make up for deficiency in these. The ancient monks of whom St. Augustine speaks in writing to Proba, could not recite many prayers, because they had to get their living by daily labour: but the frequent use of ejaculations acquired for them the merit of long prayer; and it might be said, that they continually prayed while they continually laboured.

The Divine Office Sebastian always said kneeling, and for the most part in the church before the altar of the most Blessed Sacrament; and this he advised all priests to do, warmly recommending them to fulfil this obligation not only with interior attention, but also with exterior composure; he desired too, that whoever, from a just cause, was obliged to repeat the office sitting, or with his head covered, should do it in

a place in which he would not be seen, in order that no one might suffer from the bad example. He also desired that the same mode should be used in all the other prayers, and these (this too was the advice of our holy Founder,) he wished not to be too numerous, but made with great devotion and recollection. To mental and vocal prayer he added spiritual reading, in which he was so assiduous that no sooner had he a moment free, whether in the church, at the confessional, or in his own room, as well by night as by day, well or ill, than he began to read, or have read to him, some devout book on the histories of the Saints. Among devout books, he had a preference for the "Exercise of Perfection," by Father Alphonso Rodriguez, and the Histories of the Saints, for the Lives of St. Philip Neri, St. Charles Borromeo, and St. Francis of Sales; he never grew weary of reading or of often re-reading books of this class, disapproving, as we have said, the practice of those who quickly getting tired of one book, run in search of another; "For," said he, "he who does thus, seeks to give food to his curiosity, not to his devotion."

Of the efficacy of his prayers with God we may form a conception from the sudden and wonderful effects by which they were frequently followed. Often when he prayed for the sick, the afflicted, or the wretched, they found themselves cured, consoled, and provided for. He one day recommended to the Lord a person who had an evil practice of long standing, from

which neither the advice of his parents, nor the counsels of his friends, nor the corrections of others had been able to detach him; and no sooner had the blessed man finished his prayer, than the unhappy person, sensible of his heavy guilt, felt himself quite changed, and at once abandoned the vicious friendship. Nor are like things to be wondered at; such being the fervour with which Sebastian prayed, such the elevation of his mind to God, that not unfrequently detached from sense, he neither saw those near him, nor heard any one calling him, nor was aware of any noise made by his neighbours.

Enforcing prayer as the basis of our institute, he wished that all who professed the latter, laymen as well as priests, should give their first care to becoming ardent lovers of recollection, and should nourish themselves with prayer as with corporal food, and hence he admonished them, however good and holy the employments to which they had to attend might be, never to omit prayer. This advice he repeated more frequently to the lay-brothers, on occasion of the spiritual conferences, on the one hand, stimulating them to be diligent in their several offices, but on the other, fearing lest possibly any of them under pretext of having to attend to something else should neglect his advice, he said affectionately, "My children, little do I care for, little do I seek your labours, though by them you should, so to speak, gild the whole house: that on which I lay all stress, that which I have most at heart, is the service of God and the salvation of your

souls, and this depends on the exercise of prayer. 'Watch and pray,' says the Lord, 'that you may not fall into temptation.'" Other spiritual instructions he gave on the same subject to all classes of persons. Some excessively timid souls, who were distressed because they fancied they could not make mental prayer, he encouraged by saying, that they must do all they could, and must trust in God, who would give them light and aid to do it well: they meanwhile, in doing their best, should endeavour to have sentiments of humility, confidence, and love towards Jesus crucified, without thinking of tenderness and sensible consolations, "which" (he thus wrote to a nun,) "little avail to our advancement, if they do not induce us to mortify our passions." Treating of the same matter, he was also accustomed to say, "The tears of the eyes, without those of the heart, never made any one holy. Often does aridity in prayer aid more than sweetnesses; it being usually seen that together with the latter, the love of virtue vanishes away; whereas, if a good resolution be made in aridity it abides." And again, "When the soul finds itself in such abandonment, that deprived of life it knows not how to make one act of devotion, when it seems to have an intellect without light, and a will without ardour, let it without distressing itself make some good resolution, and like the lily, amid the thorns of these pains, gradually raise itself to God, and living in quietness and peace, confide in the divine mercy." He also desired that those should not be disturbed who were

troubled with distractions and temptations in the time of prayer; but that inserting some short ejaculation, they should tranquilly pursue it without beginning it anew, since some persons continually wishing to begin over again, are always beginning and never finish a prayer; and thus growing weary, they lose their fervour, and the will to recommend themselves to God. The same method he said should be observed by any one harassed by thoughts contrary to faith, or to chastity; declaring that like temptations are more easily put to flight by a prompt turning of the heart to God, than by an anxious resistance.

CHAPTER X.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S ZEAL FOR SOULS.

The true love of our neighbour, which is indivisible from the love of God, is principally exercised in the salvation of souls. How great were the labours of the Blessed Sebastian in this respect, is known from the fact, that his long life was entirely employed in them. He had not (and this we have seen elsewhere) a single moment reserved to himself, no repose to his weariness, no relief to his advanced age; but ever inflamed with new ardour, in his own room, in church, throughout the city, and beyond it, he everywhere strove for the honour of God and the salvation of souls. When he had an opportunity of speaking with sinners, however obdurate

and obstinate they might be, his manner towards them was ever most sweet and pleasing, so that he quickly gained their hearts and drew them into his confidence. "Come," he would say, "I wish that we should be good friends; but remember never more to offend God by again committing mortal sin." These words he addressed to them with tender demonstrations of paternal affection. A cavalier of great repute was one evening walking through the passages of our house in company with the Count and President, Gionbatista Garagni. The servant of God, in going to the Oratory, passing that way, seeing these persons saluted them; then drawing the cavalier aside, he said a few words to him; after which the latter turning from his friend, took leave of him, saying, "We will meet another time; I must now go away." The count astonished at so sudden a resolution, knew not to what to attribute it. Meanwhile many days passed away before the gentlemen again saw each other. Having at length met, Garagni begged the cavalier to explain to him why on the evening in question he had so parted from him, and whither he had gone in such haste. On this the latter opening his mind to him, spoke thus: "You have always been my friend, and I am persuaded that you will continue to be so: I therefore tell you that Father Valfré is a saint; that evening on which he spoke to me in secret, he said, 'Sir, you do a great wrong to your soul.' At these words, struck with repentance, I immediately came to take leave of you, and then

retired to think of the state of my soul: and after the Oratory, I returned to Father Valfré to whom I confessed, and whom I have chosen for my spiritual director, and with his help I hope to disabuse myself of the world, and to undertake a course of life in which I can save my soul." In fact, after some days, quitting the comforts and luxuries of his house, he entered a religious order, in which having been exercised by God in various trials, and ever assisted by the Blessed Sebastian, he died a constant, faithful, and exemplary religious.

The docility which Sebastian met with in this gentleman he did not find in all persons; some resisting his counsels, mocking his holy industry, and abusing his very benefits to live in sin. But his ardent zeal and great charity, always mild and patient, never failed, never became irritated. On one occasion only, laying aside patience and mildness, he was seen to give a correction, which, although it would have been reprehensible in another, must in him be praised, inasmuch as from the effect produced, it must be attributed to a special movement certainly coming from God. A public blasphemer, although often admonished and corrected, was nevertheless obstinate and pertinacious in his detestable vice. The Blessed Sebastian passing one day through a public street, and hearing him give way as usual to scandalous blasphemies, the holy man, burning with the purest love to God, approached the blasphemer, and gave him a blow. Strange to say, the brutal man, al-

though by nature exceedingly haughty, contrary to the expectation of all, held his peace, and reflecting on his conduct, never more fell into the horrible impiety.

Sebastian, consumed with the desire of gaining souls to God, was not content with those which presented themselves to him of their own accord; but went everywhere in search of them, studying every means of insinuating himself into their confidence, and of re-conducting them into the right way. When he heard that there were in any place women of bad life, unable to endure the offence against God and the scandal it occasioned to multitudes, he obtained the necessary authority, and went unexpectedly, and even at night, to these vile meetings; he needed but to appear, and they instantly broke up; he admonished all to leave off offending Almighty God; and did he perceive any one overcome by confusion, he gently bade him come to him in the congregation, promising him every assistance. In order to remove entirely the occasion of the sin, he made the women in question retire into a place of security, furnishing them with provisions and with a suitable allowance in money; and frequently visiting them, he gave them instruction and put them in the way of doing penance: many he portioned and settled in matrimony. Proceeding thus, he raised more than two hundred from their evil condition.

In the year 1706, before the siege of Turin, there being (as has already been said elsewhere) many soldiers under the porticoes of the Piazzi

di S. Carlo, some of whom slept there in the open air, and others within the waggons destined for the carriage of the provisions for the army, the Blessed Sebastian, moved by zeal for their salvation, particularly because men and women were mingled together, went out at night, and going round these porticoes, and visiting the waggons, wherever he saw danger of offence against God, he gave salutary counsel, and adopted every suitable precaution. He persevered for some months, that is to say, as long as the danger continued, in this practice; and so great was the respect in which he was held, that no one dared oppose himself to what he said; hence, not only was he listened to and obeyed, but by his mere presence he made the most vicious tremble, and the most daring fly. In proof of this it may be added, that having one day heard that dancing of a very low description was going on in some room in the parish of St. Eusebius, he proceeded thither with Niccolò Tassarotto, and having reached the place, put his face against the door, saying, with a voice loud enough to be heard by all, "What is all this?" then stepping aside, he had the consolation of seeing as many depart as had been assembled. After this he himself locked the door, and taking the key with him, returned to the congregation: and his companion tells us in the process, that the room in question remained for a long time abandoned.

Thus gaining souls to God by the gentleness of his manner, he even came to be called the "Loadstone of Sinners;" and in this same way

of gentleness he loved that all priests should labour in procuring the salvation of souls, it greatly displeasing him if they grew angry in the correction of the erring. He could not rest if he saw a priest idle or tepid in the holy ministry, or (what is still worse) attached to some noble house in the character of a mercenary; and thus by neglecting to occupy himself profitably in the vineyard of his Lord, failing in his promises made to the Church and to God. Such a person he endeavoured to rouse from his fatal lethargy, and to excite him to labour for the spiritual welfare of his neighbour. He, above all, exhorted the young priests not to be alarmed at the difficulties which present themselves in the holy ministry, animating them now with one, now with another motive to continual labour; concluding his discourse by saying, that, "he who loves God, never says it is enough, but the more he has laboured, the more he is ready to labour." Such in truth was his own ardour. Even in the decrepitude of age, and when but recovering from severe indisposition, oppressed by the charge of the congregation, thronged by penitents desiring to confess, by the poor seeking alms, by strangers and citizens asking counsel, looked for now at the prisons, now at the monasteries, now at the hospitals, now at the court, pressed upon at the same time by numbers of persons all wishing to speak to him on subjects the most dissimilar, he was never heard to complain of being too much disturbed; nor did he refuse himself to any one, but attending to each he proved himself to be

incapable of feeling wearied, or of being wearied in his efforts for the good of all.

Nor did his zeal confine itself within the walls of Turin, but extended throughout the state. He was informed of the disorders which occurred elsewhere, both by the rectors who employed his mediation with the sovereign, and by the bishops who consulted him as an oracle for the good direction of their clergy and diocese. He answered all and suggested to all by letter the fittest means of removing abuses; using his influence with superior authorities for the suppression of vice and protection of virtue. He had other occasions of co-operating in good done to souls, even beyond Piedmont, being aided by the liberality of charitable benefactors. The most noble lady, Camilla Bevilacqua, Marchioness Villa, in the year 1687, nominated Father Sebastian executor of her last will for the disposal of her property, the whole of which was devoted to pious works, she having appointed Jesus Christ in the person of the poor as her sole Heir, and shown herself desirous that with her property left in the city of Ferrara, a house of missionaries of St. Vincent de Paul should be there founded; although this foundation was very arduous and difficult of accomplishment owing to the great obstacles which lay in the way; he did so much, principally by the protection he implored from Rome of the Cardinal Colloredo, his confidential friend, that overcoming all opposing circumstances, he succeeded in giving completion to a work so beneficial to all the souls in that vast diocese.

CHAPTER XI.

THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S SPECIAL SOLICITUDE FOR THE SPIRITUAL AID OF THE SICK.

One of the most arduous labours of the Blessed Sebastian for the salvation of souls was his care in assisting the sick and dying. "What," he would say, "is the use of sermons, instructions, confessions, if after all we fail to assist our neighbour in the dreadful moment of death?" From this consideration drawing spirit and strength, no obstacle could ever withhold him, no discomfort, no inconveniency of hour, no arguments of relations, (always moved by a weak fondness or false prudence,) could ever lessen his ardour or hinder him from approaching the sick; taking no care for himself and overcoming every human respect, he frequently visited them, prepared them with the greatest sweetness of manner to receive the Sacraments, exhorted them to resignation; and watching many nights even by their side, he never evidenced weariness nor the least disgust, although his extraordinary charity often led him even to cleanse them from that which was most calculated to excite it.

Brother Andrea Robbioni, for many years our porter, attests on oath, that while he exercised the office in question, at whatever hour, whether of the day or night, the servant of God was sent

for to a sick person, he was ever most prompt both to answer and to go where he was called for; nay, very often, and this happened even when the night was far advanced, he himself on hearing some one knock, ran down to the porter's lodge to give an answer, and at once set out for the place indicated. Nor did it unfrequently happen that having returned home, scarcely had he laid himself in his bed to take a little rest, when he was again called for to visit some one else, on which, with his usual tranquillity and promptitude, he rose again and departed. It would occupy too much space here were everything to be related that he continued to do for the good of the sick, together with the particular lights which he received for this purpose from God; nevertheless, all must not be passed over in silence.

In the beginning of the last century, when our people were at war with the French, and Turin itself was shut up by siege, it would be impossible to describe all that Sebastian accomplished in these distressing circumstances. No sooner were the wounded transported to the military hospital, than he with all love received and comforted them, fortifying them with the holy Sacraments. And not satisfied with this, ever fearing lest some should die at their posts, he anxiously went round the bastions, running up at the first cry he heard; nay more, forgetting himself, he stayed in the very street in which, from the continued cannonading, the danger was greatest, there exhorting to sentiments of contrition,

and confessing and assisting the unhappy persons who were the victims of the rage of war. Those condemned to death also experienced the measure of love Sebastian entertained for their souls. There was not one whom he did not prepare to receive the Sacraments and exhort him even on the scaffold to accept death with resignation. There were not a few who, willing to die in despair and impenitence, obstinately refused every aid of religion; in such cases, without losing energy, the good father redoubled his prayers and efforts, and in an admirable manner changed their hearts and obtained their conversion. Many persons had been labouring during a whole night to dispose to sacramental confession a condemned criminal, who never gave a single token of being willing to surrender himself or to bend, but remained fixed in his obstinacy. About dawn of day they thought of sending for Father Valfré, grounding their hopes on the sanctity of his life; and a certain Morfino, a silversmith, went for him. This person arrived at the Congregation while it was still night, knocked and obtained entrance, and having said that he had something of importance to say to Father Sebastian, he was able, being well known and accustomed to the house, to proceed without hinderance to the Blessed Sebastian's room. When just as he came up to the door, and was on the point of knocking at it, he heard the servant of God say within the closed chamber, "You may go away, I will come directly and confess him." Morfino, who had not told

any one the reason of his coming, was astonished at these words, and without once opening his lips departed, attributing the circumstance to a supernatural light received by the blessed man from God. In which judgment he remained still more confirmed when having reached the prisoner's cell, he shortly after witnessed the arrival of Father Sebastian, who had no sooner entered than he desired all who were present to kneel down and offer some prayer to obtain from God the desired conversion. Admirable was the result! they had prayed but for a few moments, when the unhappy man, conquered by Divine grace, began to tremble, and turning filled with compunction to Valfré, said, "Pray, father, help me, for I wish to make a good confession that I may die as a Christian." He did in fact make a good confession, and a change so sudden was held by all to be a miracle. Another was one that took place in the Royal Hospital of Charity. The Blessed Sebastian having one day gone there in company with a clerical student, after having confessed some one on the upper floor, was passing through certain detached rooms, in which he had to confess some others. Having entered into a room through which was the passage to those in which the sick lay, Sebastian was going straight on followed by his companion, who after having taken a few steps stopped, and hastily turned back to avoid falling down a deep place which was there, for the building not yet being finished, the floor in one part was not complete. While this person turning pale was terrified at

the depth below, he saw the servant of God walking on the air, as on a solid pavement, reach the other rooms, to arrive at which he himself was obliged to make a long round. This circumstance, the ecclesiastic meeting a short time after with Giovanbatista Salino, master of the horse, related to him even then with signs of fear of the past danger. Salino, to whom Sebastian's sanctity was well known, without much wondering at it, said to him, "Modicae fidei quare dubitasti? You ought to have had faith, and then you would have walked through the air as Father Valfré did."

The Rector of Perno, Marco Antonio Garresio of Verduno, was one day going through Turin in company with Father Sebastian, who suddenly stopped at the door of a house in the piazza di S. Carlo, and after a sigh, said with great solicitude, "D. Garresio, make haste, go up quickly: mount to the highest floor of this house, and go up to the garret." At these words the priest ran up in haste to the place indicated, and there found a poor woman who was lying on a little straw in her last agony, without any one to give her assistance. Garresio immediately began to excite her to an act of contrition, and after he had absolved her and recommended her soul to God, she calmly expired. Having fulfilled his office and quitted the spot, the priest rejoined the servant of God, who had waited for him, and who having heard all, said, "Now that we have gained a soul to God, we may be content to pursue our way." Not unlike

this are the two following facts. While Father Agostino Ainesio presided over our parish, Father Sebastian once went to his room about two hours after midnight, and made him get up at once, telling him that a dying person had need of his aid. The rector immediately sprang from his bed, and while dressing himself inquired who the sick person was, and where he lived: to which questions all the answer he heard was, "Make haste, and go through the new street; there you will find him." Although not satisfied with a like answer, the houses in the long street mentioned being extremely numerous and fully inhabited, Ainesio, moved by the veneration which he had for the servant of God, hastily departed, and proceeding onward towards the end of the street, he had already passed the Church of St. Mary Magdalen without finding any one from whom he could seek for direction. Meanwhile, he saw a door suddenly open, and a woman come out, to whom he immediately presented himself, asking her if she knew of some sick person in that quarter. "There is my husband," answered she with a tremulous voice: "he has just had a violent seizure; and I was going to seek for a priest." The father replied, "Here I am; let us go up, I am come expressly on your husband's account." And having gone up the stairs, he found an old man almost in his agony, who, quite recovering his serenity at the sight of his priest, made his confession, and not long after died.

In 1676 Count Bonaventura d' Usberg was

invited from Bavaria to Turin to condole with the Duchess Regent, widow of Charles Emanuel II., on the death of the Princess Adelaide Henrietta of Savoy. Scarcely had the Count arrived, when he was seized with a fever so malignant that in a few days it deprived him of life. The Duchess, as a mark of her particular attention to so great a personage, sent two persons belonging to her court, Christopher Faletti and Savino Antonio Pasteris, to attend to all his wants. Scrupulously executing the command of their sovereign, neither day nor night did these persons ever quit the sick man; but on the 23rd of April, the latter continuing in his usual state, and no sign of immediate death appearing, they went about midnight into an adjoining room in order to take a little refreshment with Claudio Carrera, under whose care the palace in which the count lay, was; when who should they see but Sebastian, who presented himself, asking news of the invalid. Above measure astonished at a visit from him at such an hour, they could not conceive how, the palace being closed, he could have come there. Still more amazed than the rest was Carrera, being the one who having locked the doors, had the keys with him. To assure himself still further on this point, while the two other persons accompanied Valfré to the Count, he thought he would go and examine the doors, and he found them all (as he had left them) firmly closed. The servant of God having entered the chamber of the sick man and drawn near to him, asked him

in French how he felt. The latter immediately answering him in the same language, said, "O my dear Father, God has sent you here because I need your aid," and continuing to speak, he answered every question, as the two above-mentioned persons heard, who overcome for some moments by curiosity, had stayed without behind the door. And Faletti deposes that going from time to time, as long as supper lasted, to the entrance of the chamber in order to know if anything new had occurred, he still to his surprise heard them talking of spiritual things: "And this," so he speaks, "was so delightful to me, that it seemed to me as if I heard two angels of Paradise." The few remaining hours of that night passed in like manner. Day having dawned, and Sebastian having gone away without saying a word to any one, the attendants went anxiously to the invalid to know how he had passed the night; but no sooner had they placed their feet in the room, than they saw him with his face covered, and with his crucifix on his breast already dead. It is needless to say that they bitterly grieved, well knowing how much this death would wound the regent's mind, nor that they were at the same time filled with admiration at the singular grace received by the Count, nor need it be said how much they were confirmed in the opinion they had ever entertained of our Blessed Sebastian's sanctity. This relation as well as the former one, clearly shows us that God willed the salvation of the two souls in question, and he therefore let them receive

miraculously (as is clear from the circumstances,) the assistance necessary in that most awful moment on which the eternal fate of man depends. In order to adduce another proof of the extraordinary lights Sebastian had for knowing the state and the wants of the sick, I shall here add that a certain Domenica Caterina, having pleurisy, and being at the same time attacked by a malignant spotted fever, was in a few days reduced to the last extremity. All the sacraments having been received by her, and her agony having begun, Father Giacinto Alberto Ghenzzi and the priest, Antonio De' Filippi (the rector and the curate) recommended her soul to God; and respiration having already failed, those who were present thinking her dead, had all knelt down to recite the "De Profundis." At this moment entered Father Sebastian, who hastily approaching the sick bed, kept repeating, "She is not dead, she is not dead, it is something accidental;" and stretching his hand over her head, he twice called her. The woman opened her eyes, and in confusion and terror said, "Is it possible that I am to be damned through not having had any one to suggest an act of contrition to me!" All present, full of wonder and terror, remained immoveable on their knees looking at one another without uttering a word. And turning to Valfré, the sick woman went on, "Ah! Father, at the moment of my death when I thought myself secure of salvation, God showed me in vision that I should have been damned through pride." She would have said

more, but Sebastian began paternally to admonish her, made her repent from her heart for every fault committed, and then having confessed her went away, leaving all around bathed in tears at what they had seen.

CHAPTER XII.

THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S ALMS TO CONVENTS, PIOUS PLACES, AND TO THE POOR OF EVERY PLACE AND CONDITION.

We have seen in the first chapter that even from infancy the Blessed Sebastian manifested a most tender love to the poor. With increase of years this piety so increased within him, that he was generally reputed as their father and universal protector; and this was in fact what our king, Victorius Amadeus II. called him at his death. The amount of the alms given by him is computed at one million six hundred and fifty thousand francs of the money in currency here at this day. The Mendicant Orders, the public hospitals, entire families, the poor, in a word, of every age and condition, in all the provinces of the kingdom, were amply relieved by him; and if he ever found himself unable to give anything, the sight of the miseries of others so oppressed his heart and caused him so profound a grief, that weeping with compassion and giving vent to his feelings in sighs, he redoubled his entreaties to the rich, but far more his prayers to God, that

he might obtain the means of giving to all provision, sustenance, and aid. In this chapter I shall relate those things only which may show to all in what manner and with what promptitude the blessed man exerted himself in the relief of the wretched.

The Hermit Brethren of St. Augustine who at that time had the spiritual direction of the prisons of the royal senate, having often received large sums of money from the royal finances, went to return thanks to the general of that department; but the latter let them know who had been the real author and promoter of the abundant alms, saying to them, "Go and thank Father Valfré; he has been their advocate and their true benefactor."

One day without the city, Sebastian fell in with the students of the Observantine Friars, here commonly called of St. Thomas, and for the love that he bore to religious, he went along with them and inquired in a pleasing manner concerning their studies, exercises of piety, and daily food; and having heard in how great need they were, in taking leave of them he promised to send them bread and wine. They all thanked him; but one of them added, that as often as he should be willing to do them a like charity, it would be better for them to receive instead of bread and wine, oil for burning, and paper and pens for writing. The heart of the charitable Sebastian rejoiced at the good desire of this student, and the more because he knew that the request of this one was agreeable to his com-

panions also; and having reached the congregation, he sent everything; and henceforward as long as he lived, he continued very frequently to do the same thing for the benefit of the convent in question.

For the royal hospital della Carita in which in those days about six hundred persons were lodged, he obtained extraordinary succours, sometimes from the munificence of Victorius Amadeus II., at others from the liberality of the wealthy; at his own expense he occasionally renewed all the linen, and he introduced (what had never been seen there before) masters to teach reading and writing; he did so much good in this place that at his death the poor within it, as well as the rest, wept most bitterly as if they had lost a brother or an affectionate father.

Having observed in the hospital of St. Giambatista, that in order to make room for new patients, those recovering were too quickly dismissed, and through want of wholesome food and of assistance, often relapsed into sickness more serious than the first; with a portion of the Marchese Villa's property he had twenty beds placed in the hospital for them, and four others for incurables. This wise provision introduced by his example, has been since considerably augmented by the legacies of other benefactors.

Nor was his liberality less towards the sick in private houses; he endeavoured to provide all with medicine, food, linen, and persons to wait on them; in visiting these houses, (un-

less indeed an absolute necessity obliged him to do otherwise,) in order to avoid being seen, he selected the most inconvenient hours of the day, or even those of the night. On this subject, Giambatista Buscoti, our curate, relates that having gone at break of day to a very poor sick woman, he heard from her that in the night Father Valfré had brought her a pot of broth and a faggot of wood.

Giuseppe Antonio Zelati, a youth of tender age, went one evening with his companions, to amuse himself on a spot near to our house, where for a day or two past a man had been lying asking charity, who was dirty, ragged, and so repulsive, that the very sight of him excited disgust. Now it happened that about the time night set in, Father Valfré thinking he was seen by no one, came and drew near to the poor creature, and embracing him, took him on his shoulders and carried him away. Zelati curious to see whither he would carry him, had a mind to follow him, and saw him enter into a small house behind the palace of the Marchese Tana; and wishing to know still more, he asked one Falegnami, acquainted with the spot, about him; the man answered, "He has carried him into the house of a poor widow; this man of God does many such charities; but you would do better to retire, for he does not like to be seen."

That he might always have something ready to give, the charitable father had a room in which he kept wheat, rice, vegetables, and other eata-

bles, as well as men's and women's clothes, shirts, stockings, pieces of cloth and of stuff, sheets, counterpanes, shoes, and other things: these he distributed himself, and had distributed by others; and it is to be noted, that he relieved all with so much promptitude and tranquillity of mind, that had he to provide in one day a thousand persons with different things, without being in the least disturbed, he gave satisfaction to all; and if at night he recollected that a single poor person had remained unprovided, he rose immediately even from his bed, and either went himself or sent others to remedy his forgetfulness.

In the year 1678 and the two succeeding years there was so great a scarcity in all Piedmont, that people came in crowds from all parts of the state to Turin in order to ask charity. The miseries of so many persons pierced the heart of the most loving Father, who immediately occupied himself in finding work for the healthy, and in placing in houses of reception the weak and the sick. He went to the noble and to the wealthy, he went to the Duchess Regent, and from all he brought away most ample relief, so that he was able in one day to collect full three thousand poor in the court of the arsenal, and to give to each person a loaf of bread and ten pence. Nor were other striking proofs of his ardent charity wanting. Two years before his death, after having given in public Christian instruction, a poor man presented himself to him, having nothing on but a rag of a shirt, (it was in the depth of

winter,) who shivering with cold asked relief. Seeing this man in so pitiable a condition, having made him a sign to follow him, Sebastian conducted him into the little oratory, and having taken off his own under-vest, he gave it to him that he might cover his nakedness. This work of heroic mercy had nearly cost him his life; for unable to defend himself from the severity of the season, he took a cold, being at that time an old man of little less than eighty years, which lasted for more than seven weeks.

Very frequent were his visits to the prisons, to which he never went without succouring the unhappy inmates. He compassionated them in their pains, exhorted them to resignation, and when he found some one of them more unfortunate than criminal, he strove to have the trial accelerated, and even interposed his influence with the sovereign towards procuring his pardon. The rector of Castellamonte, being falsely accused, had been shut up in the castle of Torca; and having already lain there for a year, was reduced to a bad state of health without any one's thinking of liberating him, or even of speaking in his favour. His desolate mother almost in despair went to Turin, and having sought Father Valfré, related to him in order her son's misfortunes. At seeing the tears of the distressed woman the good father was much affected, and having listened to the deplorable case, he went at once to the prime ministers of the Duke, and to the Duke himself; and such were his exertions, that in three days, the

innocence of the persecuted pastor being known, he was liberated and restored to his flock.

The slaves of the citadel, (the galley-slaves,) forgot their chains as often as they saw this charitable and beneficent man; they went joyfully to meet him, listened to him with docility, and loved him as a brother, while they respected him as a father; and he strove that all possible kindness should be shown towards them, that they might be cheered in their most fatiguing labours; and he sometimes contrived that they should even be comforted by some relief and refreshment. By these means many of these unhappy persons whom neither admonitions nor sermons had benefited, seeing so much love for them and so much liberality, turned their hearts to God; and from being idle and wicked men, became diligent workmen and good Christians.

Tender and compassionate towards the artizans who could not sell their manufactured goods, he himself went into their shops to buy something, without standing in the smallest need of it, paying a very high price for everything, even much exceeding the demand of the seller. This he particularly did with painters, booksellers, and the like; assigning moreover to the same persons a certain quantity of bread and of other eatables for the principal festivals of the year; hoping that through this aid they would more willingly occupy themselves in the sanctification of those solemnities. "Let us help the artists," he used to say, "because by this means they are resigned to the will of God, patient in

tribulations, do not forget the sanctification of the feast, and thus save their souls."

He was the father of widows, orphans, and wards, and liberally aided them, defending them from the oppression of the powerful, often having recourse for this purpose to the supreme authority; he also used his influence in favour of strangers come from the provinces, that they might be enabled to despatch their business quickly, and thus not suffer heavy loss by remaining long in Turin, "Nor consume," as he said, "all their ready money. You cavaliers who are at court, and have interest with the magistrates, are able to perform great charities without spending a penny. Persons come here from all parts of the state, who know not to whom to apply nor to whom to recommend themselves in order to get justice; you might help them, and cause them to be listened to in their just demands. Here you have an opportunity of acquiring a mass of merits for the world to come." Thus spoke the Blessed Sebastian to the men at court and to the powerful in general.

To conclude, with families once illustrious but now reduced, and with young women exposed to dangers, Valfré might be called not only liberal, but prodigal. Having heard that a gentlewoman, already a widow, with two marriageable daughters, was living with great propriety, and had not wherewith to pay house-rent, having sent for her, he gave her a hundred pistoles of gold. To a family in which there were three

young women, who by reason of extreme poverty were in some danger, he gave more than six hundred crowns, so that all three marrying they passed their lives in the grace of God. A young person of noble family having from a like cause fallen into a grievous sin, Sebastian, greatly distressed at what had happened, and fearing repeated falls, went to a banker, Lorenzo Quaglia, a rich man, and one liberal to the poor, and having told him that he was necessitated to give a dowry to a young noblewoman, he immediately received a thousand crowns which served to marry her suitably; and he was thus able to provide for the soul and for the honour of one who afterwards became an example and a mirror to all mothers of families.

Two things it appears to me I ought here to notice. The first is, that Valfré desired that charity should be always well regulated; having many times, even in the greatest need, refused alms from the rich when he knew that there were poor on the estates on which their property lay. The next is, that he was constantly extremely generous even towards those who had derided him, or maliciously abused his kindness. And this may suffice to show what weight ought to be given to the idle talk of the person who says he does not give alms that he may not foster the laziness of vagabonds, who could if they would work and gain their bread. This is called a vain excuse by St. John Chrysostom, and one suiting the avaricious, who by a like pretext seek to cover their avarice. Let these persons

remember that God will not be a loving Father but a severe Judge to him who scrupling to give a scanty alms that he may not encourage laziness, has no scruple in spending his money freely in parties, theatres, and revelry.

CHAPTER XIII.

THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN BOTH FOUND ALMS AND KNEW THE WANTS OF THE POOR, IN AN EXTRAORDINARY MANNER.

It is most certain that the greater part of the alms given by the Blessed Sebastian, are to be attributed to the piety of wealthy persons who gave him considerable sums, knowing that he would distribute them better than any one else. It would be difficult to say the sums of money that the Duchess Regent and King Victorius Amadeus gave into his hands to provide for the necessities of their beloved subjects; "not having," as they said, "any one in the whole state whom they could better trust in such a matter." Such was the esteem in which his holy life was held by all persons, and by sovereigns themselves. That a man in credit and general repute with all should have treasures to dispense, that he should obtain for the good of the poor whatever he asked, is not much to be wondered at; but what is worthy of wonder is, that sometimes when persons were in want of necessaries, it appears that God Himself in a supernatural manner came

to his assistance. One day (it was in a year of great scarcity) the priest, Antonio De' Filippi, whom we have mentioned elsewhere, having come into the congregation to speak with Father Sebastian, found him more than ordinarily joyful, standing at the entrance of his room; and scarcely had he seen him when he heard him say, "Good news, Signor De' Filippi; a little while ago I was much afflicted and full of grief at not having anything to give to the multitudes of poor that you know we have down here; but I am now beyond measure contented and rejoiced, for I have been superabundantly provided. How true it is that God never abandons him who confides in Him!" And so saying, he showed a purse full of gold, saying, that the youth with whom he had found him speaking, had brought it to him: "but," added he, "I think that he does not like being seen, for at your appearance, without ever taking leave, he departed. I nevertheless firmly hope to see him again, and to have further aids from him." And yet neither had De' Filippi nor even the house-porter seen any one. Valfré did not hope in vain. One morning when he was left without a penny, while engaged in church in hearing confessions, the same youth approached him and gave him another large sum of money, of which circumstance no one was aware, although a considerable number of persons were standing round his confessional.

Finally, omitting many facts of this kind, I shall only add that Sebastian, returning one

evening from the church into his room, which, on going away, he had locked not with the common key, but with his own particular one, he found on a small table three hundred pistoles in a little bag, without ever being able to know by whom or in what way they had been placed there. And here it is to be noted, that he was at the time in great distress, inasmuch as he had no more to give, and did not know to whom to have recourse. On this account he had been in the church all the day at the altar of St. Philip, earnestly begging him to give him the means of providing for so many families, who, in the destitution in which they were, faithfully maintained the holy fear of God.

But if the aids which Sebastian received were very frequently extraordinary, no less so was the manner in which he often became acquainted with the wants of the poor. In 1668, in the winter season, at two o'clock in the morning, during a pouring rain, having called to him Niccolò Tassarotto, a Brother of the Oratory, a very pious man, and one much in his confidence, he told him that it was absolutely necessary for him to go immediately, to carry some relief to a poor family standing in great need. Tassarotto, in spite of the torrent, going at once to the house indicated to him, found four boys with their parents sunk in melancholy and sadness, not having a mouthful of bread to break their fast, after having had nothing to eat the day before. On receiving the charity, the poor creatures loaded their benefactor with benedictions, and thanked

God for having given His servant timely knowledge of their miserable state.

In 1690, one day in front of the church of the congregation, Sebastian consigned to an ecclesiastic who was with him, some money to be carried at once to three strangers, whom, in the habit of pilgrims, he would find under the porticoes of the city palace. The person having gone to fulfil the commission, saw the three strangers coming up at that moment, who, being extremely poor, had not, in truth, wherewith to nourish themselves, nor the means of finding a place to lodge in.

But I am unwilling to pass over in silence the following relation, which I fancy may be of use to many persons. A young woman from Vercelli having united herself in matrimony with a young man in Turin, had the misery of finding that her husband was rather a brute than a man. Seized with jealousy, he compelled his poor wife (although extremely prudent and but sixteen years of age) to live in a wretched chamber in the country not very far from Turin. Remaining continually shut up there, this unhappy woman had but a little bread, and (a thing never heard of since the beginning of the world) not water enough even to quench her thirst. Having remained thus for a year or more, without ever having been able to stir from the spot, she one day gently complained to her husband that he thus treated her, earnestly begging him with tears in her eyes, to liberate her from such a prison and to treat her with more kindness. But (can

it be believed) the brutal man, far from relenting at the humble entreaties of his wife, was still more irritated, and uttering the most abusive language beat her so cruelly, that he nearly deprived her of her left eye, which remained livid and swollen as if ready to burst. Then angrily shutting the door of the room, and as he usually did, carrying the key away with him, he left his wife in the utmost desolation, without even a morsel of bread. Deprived of all consolation, she shed burning tears, and was agitated by a thousand temptations, even by that of self-destruction; while however the poor creature was in all this anguish, she suddenly saw the door of her prison open spontaneously, and Father Sebastian who was at that time unknown to her enter. At the sight of the religious, with his venerable appearance and kind manners, the woman was for a moment comforted; but fear returning, she begged him to go away, because had he been found with her by her husband, it would have been a serious matter to both. The Blessed Sebastian removed her fear, told her who he was, cured her eye which was causing her acute suffering, gave her bread, wine, and other food, and encouraging her to have patience and to hope in God, he went away closing the door behind him, which remained locked as before, although it had neither spring-lock nor latch. On the following day, the husband coming, and having opened the door with the key, seeing the remnants of the food, again growing furious, without choosing to hear a word from the poor sufferer,

and burning with anger and rage, would have committed some excess had not God watched over the safety of the innocent woman. But again the door opens of its own accord, and Sebastian enters, who with a firm aspect forcibly reprimanding the furious man for his insane conduct, told him that the few morsels about which he had so strangely enraged himself, were only the remains of what he with his own hands had the day before carried to his wife that she might not die of hunger: he told him it was now time to stop in his course, and to change his life; he commanded him to lay aside jealousy, and to live in harmony with the person whom he had received as a companion from God, if he did not wish that the severest chastisements should come upon him from heaven. The terrible aspect with which the blessed man had spoken, and the words he uttered, produced a marvellous effect. The man, from being furious as a bear becoming gentle as a lamb, threw himself weeping at the feet of Valfré, who at once resuming his mildness of manner embraced him, paternally admonished him, and reconciled him with his wife, with whom from that moment he ever lived in peace and most perfect union. The resignation and patience with which this excellent wife bore the very heavy cross which it pleased God to give her, had the effect of making God even work miracles both to change the heart of the husband, and to render her happy and contented.

Time would fail should I seek to relate the

supernatural occurrences of this kind, clearly proved and reported in the processes; I shall therefore relate only this one fact more, which will serve as a seal to the matter now before us. Sebastian having filled several bags with bread and other provisions, charged a carrier to convey them up the neighbouring hills to a family of country people. The carrier, to whom the name of this family had not been given, nor the exact place of their abode pointed out, begged the servant of God to be so good as to tell him more clearly where he was to go, as he had not been able to understand to what poor persons he was to consign the provisions. Sebastian replied, "Just let the horse go his own way up the mountain, and he will stop before the people to whom I send you." And so it was. The horse without being guided, as if endued with understanding, went straight to the spot where the sufferers were, who not having been able to work for some days, would without this providential supply have had nothing with which to support life. Not only the Blessed Sebastian but many saints, urged by a celestial impulse, have done these things which appear to us rather entertaining than anything else. Who knows but that God may in this way have willed to manifest their sanctity because they diligently studied to hide it from the eyes of the world?

CHAPTER XIV.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S HUMILITY.

The high esteem and reputation in which Sebastian stood with all persons, the singular gifts and graces which he had from God, might have lifted him into something like self-complacency, had not this worthy son of St. Philip ever had as his companion, guide, and mistress, holy humility, a virtue laughed at by the Gentiles, understood by Christians, and held most dear by saints. He knew all good to be from God, and all he attributed to himself was nothingness and sin; he considered himself as of no account whatever, as inferior to every one, as unworthy to be in the congregation; nor was there a wicked man whom he did not believe to be in some point better than himself. He showed by indubitable signs that he had this opinion in his heart. "God has given me, and still gives me strong impulses," he thus spoke one day in the spiritual conference, "to enable me to become His true servant; but alas for me! that I cannot answer these divine calls; my brethren, pray for me, who am the worst of all, though it may be that I am the most favoured of all. I deserve every kind of contempt, opprobrium, blame, every kind of abuse and persecution from men; and I deserve to be punished by God with the most tormenting infir-

mities and most terrible castigations; so that to tell you the truth, my brethren, my life is rather that of a hypocrite than of a priest." And another time also in the conference: "How mean and abject an opinion it becomes me to have of myself! how ought I to esteem myself as nothing! Oh, how profoundly should I abase myself beneath the inscrutable judgments of God, finding myself, as I do, to be indeed nothing! I have not, as far as I know, done anything good; nay, I have always been inclined to vices; and hence what have I hitherto merited but hell and the fire which endeth not? I have sinned, O Lord, I have sinned; have mercy on me, O my God: pardon my so many crimes." Let him who reads, consider that it was a saint who thus thought of himself.

During a serious illness, the physicians speaking to him of the labours which he accomplished and which exceeded his strength, sought to induce him to remit them in some degree, if not to preserve his life, at least for the good of the congregation. At these words the humble Sebastian deeply blushed and appeared much grieved: "What are you saying?" he replied, "I myself need the congregation; but the congregation neither has nor can have need of me who am a most wretched creature. Were I driven away from it, (from my heart I pray the Lord God that through His mercy He may never permit it,) I should be in no way surprised, well knowing that I am not worthy to be here."

In order to give others an idea of his mean-

ness and contemptibleness, he desired and sought as much as possible contemptible and mean offices. When the Filippini came from the village of Po to St. Eusebius, Sebastian with three of his novices determined to carry on their shoulders the large portrait of St. Philip, and to pass thus by day through the most populous streets of the city, exposing themselves to the jests and derision of the vulgar and of the idle. Nor did he study less to be reputed a stupid ignorant person. There was no danger of his ever introducing conversation on science, either sacred or profane, in which he was extremely well versed; and did the authority of superiors oblige him to this, he was very reserved in what he said, and without making a display of erudition and acquirement he coldly gave his opinion. Nay, he sometimes employed the following subtle device: finding himself, that is, with learned men in conversation of the kind in question, he got out of it as well as he could into things which had nothing whatever to do with the subject, whence he more than once obtained the end he desired; those however who knew him well, forming an ever better conception of him understood the meaning of these his innocent artifices. What a lesson is this for the youth of our times! Some of whom while extremely ignorant, think they can talk of everything, censure everything, pronounce sentences on the most reputed writers, and (what exceeds all the bounds of temerity) give judgment on works which they neither know nor have ever seen! What ambition, what pride

is this! what eagerness to appear literary and learned without being so! I know not what these youths will be disposed to say on reading this chapter.

Even in his public addresses Sebastian strove to give an unfavourable opinion of himself; and this he was accustomed to do when he observed the concourse of those who went to hear him to be greater than usual. He several years delivered the sermon for the feast of St. Sebastian; he took for his subject the arrows with which the holy martyr was pierced; and making the following rare application of them, he said, that "some persons were struck by the arrows of justice, others by those of mercy, others again by those of the holy fear of God;" each year treating on this most curious subject in almost the same words, he made himself so remarked upon, that when the feast came some used to say jokingly, "It was the grand day of the panegyric of the three arrows." On hearing that many persons were repeating this saying in ridicule of his discourse, he experienced unbounded pleasure. At other times, and this too when speaking in public, he took out his breviary, reading therein some text which he knew perfectly by heart, to make his hearers think his memory deficient. If he went to any house in which he was not known, on being asked who he was, he answered, "A priest of Langhe;" a mode of expression taken in a mean sense in Piedmont, and corresponding with the epithet "country priest" in other parts of Italy. The

servants being amused at such an answer, often made him wait a long time, announcing him to their masters when they were tired of seeing him any longer. Through having presented himself under this appellation, he was obliged on one occasion to content himself with communicating as a layman, it not having been permitted him to celebrate the holy mass in Savona, (whither he had gone for this purpose on foot,) in the church in which is the miraculous image of the most Holy Mary; the same that was solemnly crowned in our days (1814) by Pope Pius VII. of immortal memory, in the presence of many cardinals and prelates, of King Victorius Emanuel, of the Queen Maria Theresa his consort, of the princesses their daughters, of the queen of Etruria, and of other noble and most illustrious personages. But the most subtle mode which he found of debasing himself, was to display the meanness of his birth and the low condition of his parents. "I am," he often said even from the pulpit, "I am a poor cowherd's son, received through charity among the Fathers of the Oratory of St. Philip, and my brothers are indigent peasants." A niece of his who had entered into the monastery of the "Most Holy Annunciation," had fallen sick; Sebastian went to inquire after her health, and found there the physician, who was just speaking of her with the superior; after having listened to him for a moment, he interrupted him, saying, "Had my niece gone on hoeing in the fields she would not now be ill."

One of his sisters having to come to Turin

with other relations in order to take the veil, it occurred to him that he had now a good opportunity of bringing ridicule both on himself and on those belonging to him. Musing therefore on what was to be done, he went to the Marchioness di Pancaglieri, earnestly entreating her to lend him her carriage, for that some ladies to whom he wished to show great attention, being about to arrive in Turin, he desired that they should make their entry with due honour. On hearing this the Marchioness, both to honour these ladies and to gratify Valfré, at the appointed hour sent her handsome carriage drawn by six horses, and placed herself at a window curious to witness the arrival. For my part, I know not if it can be imagined how this lady felt on seeing her coach full of poorly dressed peasants. All I can say is, that at this novel spectacle the people laughed immoderately; nor were open signs of mockery and contempt wanting. But this was not the only mortification which he gave these poor women. On the day of their reception into the monastery, being come thither in a carriage, Sebastian having placed himself at the door where a crowd was assembled to see the ceremony, while the women were getting out of the carriage, he said with a loud voice that he might be plainly heard by all, "Is it possible that you could think of going through Turin in a coach, you, who in Verduno, could not so much as ride in a cart?"

In 1674 the most holy Winding-sheet being exposed to public veneration, another of his sisters

moved by devotion came to the city. That there might be no person of noble family who could forget his low birth, already known in the case of the Marchioness di Pancaglieri, Sebastian made her lodge at first in the palace of the Marchioness d' Avigliana, one of the first ladies at the court; afterwards under pretext of not intruding too long on the kindness of the latter, he removed her to another most noble house, and then to another; so that after a few days all the nobility of Turin knew Father Valfré's sister. Nor did he treat his mother better. She being come to see her son, the Marchioness di S. Gennaro, who had received her into her house, determined to dress her nicely, though with great simplicity, making her take off her country garments and the cloth from her head. Having presented herself in this guise to Sebastian, and expecting to be received by him with marks of benevolence and love, the woman heard him say to himself, "Who are you? I thought to see my good mother who is a poor country-woman; but here I see another person with whom I have nothing to do." And saying these words he turned away from her. The woman understanding the sentiments of her son, immediately ran to the house, and having again put the cloth over her head and the coarse garment over her shoulders, returned to him; and thus clothed, was received just as a loving mother should be received by a loving son.

The condition of his relations and the lowness of his birth the Blessed Sebastian thought might

be a strong shield which he could oppose to Victorius Amadeus, who was determined to nominate him to the archbishopric of Turin. "Does your Royal Highness," he one day said to him, "think that a miserable priest whose relations are hoeing the fields should be the archbishop of this your metropolis?" And having sent for one of his brothers from Verduno, who was to come to him dressed in the same clothes in which he worked in the field, he took him to the court, and making him pass through all the antechambers, said to the guards and gentlemen in waiting, "Do you see? this is one of my brothers:" and he thus presented him to the Sovereign, who at once perceiving Valfré's stratagem, said to him, "Do what you will, Father Sebastian, abase yourself as you please; but as for me, I am absolutely resolved to give you this archbishopric." Sebastian seeing that all his contrivances availed nothing, turned in most ardent prayer to God, and finally succeeded in inducing the duke to nominate some other person to the dignity. This circumstance he immediately communicated to Cardinal Colloredo at Rome, his protector and friend, begging him to recite the Te Deum at St. Philip's altar, for the most signal favour which God had been pleased to grant him.

But the blessed man sought more than this. He wished to withdraw himself from all offices which conciliate the honour and esteem of the world. On this account he solicited the duke both verbally and in writing, (and this he had

done many times already,) to choose another person for his confessor. The following is one of the numerous letters which he wrote on this subject in 1689: "Your Royal Highness well knows how often and in how many ways since the time that you deigned to nominate me as your confessor, you have been supplicated by me to be pleased to permit me to withdraw myself from so highly honourable an office, as being a charge disproportioned to my ability. Nor do I know why your Royal Highness, who has ever loaded me with most distinguished favours, has not yet chosen to console me in this point, unless indeed it be that you take that for virtue which is mere ignorance, and which again obliges me to renew my most humble entreaties, hoping that your Royal Highness will finally listen to them. In giving me this relief your Royal Highness will do a real good to yourself, being able to select a confessor who, endowed with prudence, learning, and probity, may be able to assist you as you desire. I am confounded, and I blush at the consideration of my utter deficiency, owing to which alone it becomes me to renounce so great an honour, if I wish to live with any quiet of conscience. Meanwhile I assure your Royal Highness that neither in mass nor in my other poor prayers shall I ever fail to pray to God for the greater prosperity of your Royal Highness, whose hand I most humbly kiss, subscribing myself," &c. His entreaties would certainly never have had the effect desired by him, if in the following year, when owing to war, the duke had to set out

for the camp, his age and his health had permitted him to follow him.

Nor with all this was his most profound humility contented; he tried to disburden himself even of the office of superior of the congregation. The time for the renewal of the different offices being at hand, he in the public conference exhorted all fervently to recommend themselves to God, that He might give the light necessary for knowing the deserving; he then addressed his supplications to the fathers, begging them to select another superior, he being no longer good for anything, and promising in compensation of what he asked as a favour, to recite a whole Rosary for each of them. But he spoke to the deaf, for the fathers having experienced how beneficial it had been to the congregation to have him for its head, were steadfast in the decision already made of confirming him in the rank in which he stood. This decision both filled him with confusion and caused him much grief, which he vented in bewailing the too great kindness of his brethren.

In short, the mind of this servant of God was totally detached from every species of human ambition; so alienated was it from whatever could bring him anything like glory, (and this more especially in relation to those offices which bring with them the obligation and care of souls) that after his death was found written with his own hand what follows: "I will never take an office or rank of honour, particularly if it oblige to the care of souls, however much I may be

encouraged to do so, because I have not the qualities necessary for these things; nor will I ever suffer myself to be moved from this resolution, just as no man who had not studied medicine would ever be induced to act the part of a physician, nor that of an architect, if he were not one. This resolution however, which I propose most firmly to keep, shall never make the smallest change in the one which I made when but just ordained priest; namely, to strive with the help of God, ever to serve all persons according as my ability should permit, and with equal promptitude, the mean and poor no less than the noble and rich." These sentiments, while they show self-love to have been completely dead within him, make still more resplendent the fire of the divine charity with which, as we have seen, his heart was habitually inflamed.

CHAPTER XV.

ON THE SAME SUBJECT.

He who arrived at this degree of self-humiliation was well able to be a master to others in this virtue. Sebastian therefore made it his study to excite the love of it in the fathers and brothers of the congregation, and in all persons under his direction. To say nothing of sermons and other teachings, it may be asserted with all truth, that he never spoke with any one without touching more or less on holy humility, or uttering some maxims in relation to it.

"With the humble is constant peace, but in the heart of the proud is jealousy and frequent vexation."

"It does thee no hurt to place thyself beneath all persons, but it does thee the greatest to place thyself above even one."

"God protects the humble and saves him; the humble He loves and consoles; to the humble He inclines Himself; to the humble He is abundant in grace; to the humble He opens His mysteries, and gently invites and draws them to Himself."

"The most certain mark of our predestination is humility, through which we humble ourselves beneath the judgments of God and of man; for when we do thus, God fails not to assist us with His grace."

"Think not thou hast advanced one step in the way of the Lord, if thou considerest not thyself as less than all."

"If I abase myself, reduce myself to my own nothingness, and put away from me all self-esteem, Thou, my God, wilt be liberal in grace to me, and Thy light will shine around my heart. Abandoned to myself I am nothingness and mere infirmity; dost Thou look upon me with benignity, I at once become strong, and am filled with a new gladness."

"The humble please all and are loved by all, whereas the proud, whatever be their talent or learning, are never heartily loved and valued, but on the contrary, are for the most part, dreaded and shunned."

Sometimes one, sometimes another of these sayings was repeated by the Blessed Sebastian, and when he saw that they had entered into the minds of his subjects, then in imitation of St. Philip, he prescribed to this or that person some act of humiliation in private as well as in public. While Brother Andrea Robbioni was a novice, Sebastian, every time he met with him, assuming a very grave aspect, and as if reproving him, said, "You are neither humble, nor modest, nor obedient; you do not know what virtue is." But let us hear what he did to Brother Giuseppe Caresole.

A chapter was held for the admission of this brother, and because he was a man of extraordinary virtue, he was at once accepted with an abundance of votes. Now Sebastian, in order to put him to the last test, pretending that all the consultors had been opposed to him owing to their being aware of a subtle pride in him, told him (and in so doing manifested regret and pain,) that he must depart immediately and go home: adding however, (and this was to give a better colour to the matter,) that after six months he might return if he chose, and that he would then endeavour to propose him anew, and would again try the disposition of the fathers. The good brother without being at all disturbed, promising to return so soon as the time should be over, was very submissively and humbly taking leave of the blessed man and going away. Sebastian, seeing how much self-command Caresole possessed, unable to re-

strain his tears, tenderly embracing and kissing him, said, "No, my dear son, you have not to depart from this congregation, whose founder you so well know how to imitate. The whole chapter was in your favour: nor could it be otherwise, your great virtue meriting this. Go on, my dear son, in this spirit; for this is the path to be followed by him who loves to correspond worthily to the call of God, from whom alone we receive every gift, every grace, every good."

Father Agostino Boetio, who enjoyed public esteem alike within and without the congregation, as being a priest no less learned than pious, was about to come out of the noviciate. Sebastian, who had often had an opportunity of observing with how great virtue his mind was adorned, wished to give him an occasion of exercising it, and desired at the same time, that Turin should take from a son of St. Philip an example of humiliation, self-contempt, and renunciation. The next day was Holy Thursday, on which the archbishop, according to the religious rite of the Holy Church, was accustomed to wash the feet of twelve poor persons. Sebastian having previously well considered every thing, went into the chamber of Boetius, and manifesting full confidence and great friendship in his regard, said to him in a cheerful tone, "Our congregation is not a little pleased at seeing among its members a person of so much merit as yourself; for I am sure that I know not one who can place himself, I do not say above

you, but on a level with you, as to learning and talent, to say nothing of the many other endowments of your noble mind, distinguishing you from others. All the fathers recollect with pleasure how honourably you acquired the laurel in theology; with pleasure they recollect what eloquence, what profound knowledge were exhibited in your sermons, through which you are with a good right, reputed to be the first orator among those with whom we are acquainted; with pleasure they recollect the zeal ever manifested by you in all the functions, in all the labours belonging to a priest. For these reasons they wish, before you complete your noviciate, to give you a public token of the esteem in which all hold your reverend person, and the public token is this. To-morrow our archbishop, whose most worthy secretary you were, performs the customary act of washing the feet of twelve persons. Now the whole congregation has willed that you should be one of those fortunate persons: and I have obliged myself (you cannot imagine with what effort) to contrive to have you put into this select number, the honour in question being one desired by many, and one which never till this day has any one of our body been able to obtain." Having said this, and rejoicing with him at his good fortune, he turned from the novice and went away. Father Agostino's heart sunk a little, and the more because the address was so contrived that in the beginning it flattered his self-love, while it ended in requiring an act of the greatest abasement. Nevertheless, submitting

himself to the will of his superiors, he went the day after to make himself companion of those to whom with his own hands he had often given alms, and publicly subjected himself to the reception of an office which any person of his station would with reason have considered to be a disgrace. A humiliation of such a nature, being at once known through every part of the city, turned to the common benefit of the inhabitants.

Little less humiliating was the command that Sebastian gave to Father Gabriel Cervino. One Sunday when he saw the concourse of persons in the church at the hour of instruction greater than usual, he sent him to take his post among the boys who came to be instructed in reference to their first communion. To see a priest of rather commanding appearance sit down amid a troop of little boys, stand up, and answer certain questions which would not perhaps have been put to a child of five years of age, and to see Sebastian at the same time give tokens of admiration at the just answers of the pupil, to whom, in the presence of all, he gave with many praises the reward customary on such occasions, moved all present to smile. But this same thing which at first made more than one laugh, (be it known to the reader,) did more good to all who were assembled in the place than a sermon would have done.

Father Maurizio Filipponi, while prefect of the sacristy, had made a beautiful and rich decoration for the frame of a crucifix, before which the Father St. Philip was in secret accustomed

to pray; and wishing to place beneath it a Latin inscription indicating the circumstance, he begged Father Ormea, one of our number, to make one. The inscription was made and carried to Sebastian, in order that being superior he might give it his approbation. Having barely glanced at it, Sebastian treated it with contempt as barbarous and full of solecisms; at the same time plainly declaring that he would never allow it to be exposed in public, the honour of the congregation not permitting it. Ormea, who was well versed in Latin, sought to prove his work to be not so much amiss, bringing with him authorities and examples in its favour: but remaining firm, Sebastian said to him, "Talk as you will, you can never persuade me that bad is good;" and having thus spoken he dismissed Ormea with little ceremony. Greatly mortified, Ormea passed some days half bewildered, until the Blessed Sebastian desiring to console him, having gone to him, told him that his inscription was both beautiful in itself and extremely pleasing to him, and that he might therefore place it where Filipponi wished: he begged Ormea to excuse him if he had at first exhibited any other sentiment, both because he had little considered it, and because he most frequently judged, not with rectitude, but from passion and impulse: in short, he thanked him for the work accomplished, which was an honour, not only to himself, but to all the Fathers of the Oratory.

Sebastian acted in a similar manner with his penitents, and with other persons. A daughter

of the already mentioned Carlo Ricca, named Martha Maria, being about to enter into religion, received from Valfré, who was her confessor, an obedience to go to the nuns and say, that "they were one and all much mistaken if they thought she had a monastic vocation to obey and to serve, for all she understood was how to command; that she also advised them (as she liked to live well and without labour) to take care to treat her liberally in the refectory, and let her live in idleness." The fulfilment of this command must certainly have cost some effort; but it was nothing in comparison with what she had to do the first day she entered into the monastery. After she had made her confession, Sebastian enjoined her, in the evening when supper was over, before the nuns rose from table, to begin to sing a certain song in the Piedmontese language, made in derision of one who lives deferring the things of to-day till the morrow, without ever resolving on anything; thus turning herself into ridicule, as if she ought to have done in youth what she was now doing at a somewhat advanced period of life. On hearing this, Martha Maria earnestly entreated her confessor, with tears in her eyes, not to give her such a mortification, declaring herself most ready to do anything else he liked; but it was all to no purpose, for Sebastian without even answering a word, shut the grate of the confessional in her face. The lady remaining thus, and anticipating the laughter that she must encounter from the community at this strange novelty, was filled with confusion.

While in this truly pitiable state it occurred to her, that possibly Valfré might during the day withdraw the command; and this thought comforting her a little, she was able to conceal the internal pain which tormented her. But the evening being come, without her hope being fulfilled, any one can imagine the increase of her distress, and the point to which it reached when she knew that the hour for supper had arrived: it shall suffice us to say, that Martha Maria, without taking a morsel of food, passed the whole of supper-time in tears and sobs. The terrible moment being at length come, doing a heroic violence to herself, with a tremulous voice, she tried to sing; but scarcely had she pronounced the first word, when the prioress, who had been well instructed in everything by Sebastian, imposed silence upon her, showing herself fully satisfied and pleased with her; thus Martha Maria remained with the merit of a signal victory, and the nuns with the edification of so great virtue.

Father Prospero da Rivoli, a Capuchin, and a man of great learning and prudence, in an attestation sworn in 1720 deposes, that on St. Philip's day in 1674 he became acquainted with Father Sebastian Valfré in the following manner: "Having gone with a companion of mine," (he thus expresses himself,) "to the church of the Fathers of the Oratory to hear the panegyric, both of us desiring to kiss the rosary which the saint had used, we sought for Father Agostino Boezio, who being our friend showed the utmost readiness to gratify us, and conducted us to Fa-

ther Sebastian in order to get leave to do so. No sooner had we seen him than we wished to kiss his hand. This he would not permit, but looking at us bluntly said, 'What are these friars looking for? How much better they would do in staying at their own convent than in wandering about!' And having heard our pious wish he resumed with a gesture of disdain, 'Think you that it is a trifling thing to see and to kiss the rosary of St. Philip? But tell me, have you both confessed this morning?' We answering that we had not, but that we had, although unworthily, celebrated the holy mass, resuming his serene aspect and accustomed tone, he said, turning to Boezio, 'Go and comfort these two good religious; they are worthy sons of St. Francis.' Thus" (continues Father Prospero) "did this great servant of God frequently act, in order to try the virtue of the persons who came to him. From that day forward I endeavoured to see him and to speak with him as often as possible. Once when I went to call upon him, having a clerical student with me, (it was in the month of April, and perhaps about two o'clock in the afternoon,) I found him standing in his room, and rubbing off the dirt spots on his habit. He received us very graciously, and asked us many questions about our rule, he all the time going on removing the spots; and being well aware that my companion was a saint like himself, he determined to make an attack upon him, and such an one it was that I myself, who knew the virtue of my companion, feared that it might yield

to so fierce an assault. Taking occasion then from having once seen him spit, he said to me, 'This little companion of yours is very nice; ever since he came in he has done nothing but spit; I don't know how it is the dust is so troublesome to him; we must open the window to accommodate his Reverence.' Then addressing himself to him with eyes that seemed on fire, 'If,' said he, 'you cannot bear this little dust, how will you bear the mortifications that your superiors will give you? How shall you be able to fast, use the discipline, get up in the night? The life of a Capuchin is not a life of delicacy; you would therefore do better (and very well pleased would you be to do so) to take off this habit which you have on your shoulders, for it's not fit for you.' The good ecclesiastic, however, without changing his aspect, maintained his usual serenity, suffering in peace the unmerited reproof. Sebastian, rejoicing within himself at seeing the student so established in virtue, determined to repeat his attack, and making show of increased anger said, 'Here is the face of a daring fellow! I reprove him for the most serious faults; he makes sport of me, does not mortify himself, nor even blush! But I can no longer contain myself, so quit this room instantly; thou seemest to me a precious villain; I can no longer bear to see thee before me, for, to tell thee the truth, I know not what hinders me from going beyond words.' And with all humility the good ecclesiastic was going away, thanking him for so charitable an admonition. Then Valfré, running to

him and throwing himself at his feet, which he respectfully kissed, said to him, 'Blessed art thou, who at so early an age art endued with virtue so extraordinary! Joyfully maintain thyself in this spirit, and know that God preserves thee for great things.' Valfré's prediction was not a vain one, for this young man crowned his holy life with martyrdom." Father Prospero, after having given this narration, finished by saying, that every time he spoke with this servant of God, or saw him, he seemed to remain full of consolation.

It appears to me that what we have related in these two chapters may suffice to show how diligently the Blessed Sebastian followed the traces of our holy founder, and how he employed every means to establish in himself and in others humility of heart, the foundation and origin of all virtue.

CHAPTER XVI.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S OBEDIENCE.

He who is entirely humble is also entirely obedient, the two virtues of humility and obedience going hand in hand, neither being able to stand or fall without the other. Sebastian's humility therefore being, as we have said, so great, his obedience could not but be most perfect. Without then stopping to speak of that which, joined with the most profound veneration, he ever rendered to the Pope, or of that which he always

rendered to the archbishops of Turin and the bishops of his own country, (the least sign from whom was sufficient to make him perform any work, undertake anything whatever,) we shall in this chapter with as much brevity as possible, relate some of the many proofs of obedience which he gave in the congregation, from which the reader will easily be able to conjecture the rest. Although he was the support and the father of the congregation, inasmuch as if he did not give it its first being, he certainly maintained it by his labours, caused it to prosper, and established it in a most flourishing condition; nevertheless when his humility succeeded in resigning his office as superior, he manifested to the superior all that reverent subjection which is often vainly sought for even in a good novice, allowing himself to be guided and conducted by him, although the superior in question had been his disciple and his pupil. He gave him a minute account of everything, entirely resigned himself to his wishes, and showed himself prompt to relax, quit, or augment his labours; nay, in order scrupulously to fulfil his every desire, he had adopted the practice of noting down the sentiments of his superior in writing, a practice which he constantly observed even to his latest years. With the date of the 31st of December, 1698, the new superior having been created three days before, the following notes are found written with his own hand: "I no sooner knew that the president had provided for those things for which of necessity a new superior must at once pro-

vide, than I went to him, and so far as time permitted, rendered to him an account of every action of my life. I have mentioned to him one by one, all the places where I go to hear confessions, preach, catechise, or give instruction, &c., and he has had the goodness to approve everything. He has let me know that he should like for me to go to the hospital of St. Giovambatista, having much at heart the interests of that pious place, and I have told him that I regard his every desire as a command; that I would therefore, in future, go there at least once a week, and would try to do all the little good that my slender ability should permit. This superior is truly a man of God: he is personally animated by genuine zeal. He is never weary of commending the service of the public, and labours for the salvation of souls." And with the date of the following day, which was the first of the year 1699, is found written in like manner: "I have been speaking this morning for two hours with the superior on all the matters which can in any way regard the whole community; and the conclusion of our conversation was this, that, 'as far as is possible without omission of community acts, we must aid our neighbour and serve all persons.' But I now recollect having told him that in the same places to which I go to do what good I can, I often find persons with whom I have to treat on something concerning the house, and that I avail myself of the opportunity; this also he has approved." We have judged it well to cite these two passages,

that every one may know that the Blessed Sebastian did nothing, however good and holy it might be, without the permission of his superior. Certain too it is that he never went anywhere to do good but by the will, either of the sovereign, the archbishop, or the apostolic nuncio, who conferred upon him many important spiritual privileges; moreover he desired that the things which these persons commanded should have the approbation of the superior of the house, because, "in this way" (so he used to say) "we are more assured of the will of God." So great was the esteem in which Sebastian held obedience, which, to say the truth, has been at all times and by all persons considered as a virtue; but fashionable philosophy has now decided, that obedience is not a virtue, but the mere effect of baseness of mind and of weakness. "The mind of man, which is most noble, ought never to abase itself by accepting a suggestion of any kind."

"If it is perfectly clear, even to a child, that the thing commanded is pleasing and useful, let it be done, because it is proper to be done, not for any other reason."

"Man wishes to be happy; and happiness can never be attained but in acting of our own accord."

Such are the just and most noble sentiments of some to whom I know not what name to give: sentiments (the offspring of pride and haughtiness) which it has cost no great trouble to put into the minds of various persons, or even of inexperienced youth, who, in order to show their

spirit, desire to subject everything to their criticism, and to obey when it seems good to them to do so. We then have to gather the fruits of these noble principles, which both oppose themselves to the divine law, and (one need but have eyes to see it) conduct the world to ruin. Nothing but the omnipotent hand of God, since every other hope is vain, will be able to bring men back to the path of the good and the just. But returning to Valfré, it falls in my way to say, that as the blessed man sought to try the virtue of others, so did others seek to try his virtue. Were I to relate everything on this subject a wide field would extend itself before me; for so many things are there, that it would be difficult to get to the end of them; hence, speaking as usual with brevity, I shall mention only one or two facts.

Father Agostino Boezio was superior; it was he who, as we have said in the foregoing chapter, had to place himself, by desire of the Blessed Sebastian, among the poor on occasion of the washing of the feet; Sebastian having to go to the prisons, (he was accustomed every week to go to them on the day in question, as every one knew,) and going to ask leave to do so, Boezio, although in the company of a person of some consideration, with firm aspect and laconic brevity, answered "No;" and as if a like negative had been a trifling humiliation to a man already old, and who never went out but to do good, he added, "And I really am astonished that, considering your age, you do not try

to give a little good example to the young, by remaining in holy recollection in your own room, instead of showing yourself all the day wandering to no purpose through the city." Is it thus persons speak to a man generally esteemed as a saint? Is he thus addressed who has deserved so well of the whole congregation? Is he, in fine, thus addressed who had been superior for so many years, and to the satisfaction of all? But, without failing in the respect due to a superior, Sebastian, who is no novice, will surely say something modestly in his defence, were it only that the person present may not be scandalized? The servant of God, on the contrary, having heard the answer given and received the reproof, made a profound reverence, and returned into his room with the same peace of mind, the same serenity of countenance, with which he had shortly before issued from it. Thus do the saints conduct themselves, loving to follow the maxims of the Gospel rather than those of the world.

But Sebastian had to give a specimen of far higher virtue on another occasion. He had always had a most lively desire to go to Rome to visit its holy places, and more particularly, to breath forth his devotion over the mortal remains of St. Philip, which are jealously preserved and may be seen in the church dedicated to him. But owing to the affairs of the congregation and those put into his hands by the sovereign, the apostolic nuncio, and the archbishop, he had never been able to leave Turin. It now

appearing to him that the time for making this journey was come, he sought the permission of the superior, who not only at once freely condescended to all his pious wishes, but moreover, encouraged him to set out directly, and gave him various commissions for the holy city. Everything then being arranged, he had already taken leave of the fathers and of his friends; and the morning fixed for his departure being arrived, accompanied by F. Genesio Carriatore and by many persons devoted to him, he set out for the Po in order there to embark. Just as he was about to leave the port, Carriatore gave him a note which he had a secret commission from the superior to deliver to him at that very moment. The note ran thus: "As soon as you have read these few lines, you will immediately return to the congregation, thinking no more of the journey to Rome." I desire that the reader would here reflect for an instant that Valfré was a man extremely well known and in the high repute of which we have often spoken; that all Turin had known of this journey; that he had taken leave of all the nobility, of the archbishop, the nuncio, nay of the sovereign himself, and of all the royal family: now what will a man such as he, and in such circumstances do? Having read the note, he directly took up his packages and got out of the vessel, merely saying, "Let us return home; the journey to Rome is delightful and is at an end." Shall then this conduct be designated as the result of baseness and weakness, and not rather

be regarded as heroic virtue proceeding from a noble and generous mind that knows how to conquer itself, and to maintain the dominion acquired. Let him who reads in an unimpassioned manner form his own judgment. But Sebastian could not do otherwise, having settled in his mind this maxim, frequently repeated by him, "He who walks in obedience goes securely to Paradise."

CHAPTER XVII.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S FORTITUDE, PATIENCE, AND MILDNESS.

To undertake arduous and extremely difficult things for the good of souls, to prosecute what is so undertaken with diffidence in ourselves and with a firm hope in the omnipotent aid of God; finally, to accomplish these things through constancy in spite of innumerable obstacles; this is Christian fortitude, one of the four cardinal virtues. That Sebastian possessed it in a heroic degree, and one above that of the faithful in general, was the uniform and universal sentiment of all the witnesses examined in the process, all of whom agreed that without it he could not possibly have been able to support the labours, so weighty and so unremitting, amid which he passed his life. That such they were we have already seen in what has been written up to this point; whence that which we shall say in

this chapter, we intend as a trifling addition to what has been already said.

And in the first place it is to his fortitude alone that the subsistence of the Oratory in Turin must be attributed. Inexpressible were the discomforts which our people had to suffer at that time in the house and in the church which were as yet inconvenient, small, and close. The first Filippini were annoyed at this; and this annoyance daily increased, since, although in order to improve their situation, they often changed the spot, they had never been able to find either a house or a church, which even if not good might at least be such as to enable them to perform the sacred functions with necessary propriety and decorum. And this great inconvenience and intolerable annoyance would certainly have led to the dissolution of our congregation, had not Valfré, whose courage never failed, held the fathers together by his counsels and consolations. One day all being assembled for the spiritual conference, he thus spoke at the opening of it: "If, fathers and brothers, I saw that our affairs all went on prosperously, I should greatly fear for us; because, well knowing that God corrects and afflicts those whom He loves, did we see ourselves spared, we should have reason to doubt of being favourably regarded by Him. But blessed be His will, according to which He makes us suffer a little, and in this way deigns to certify to us His love. Secure of this, what can we fear? Will we, or will we not believe Jesus Christ, who said, 'Blessed are

they who suffer?' If we believe that He spoke the truth, we must certainly believe that tribulations are real favours that God bestows upon us, and that he does not, generally speaking, confer benefits of this kind except on His friends who serve Him the most faithfully; for be assured, that by this means alone the soul is purified, detached from itself, and united to God by the purification of its affections. I should therefore fear not a little for our congregation did I see it prosper; for in that case I should fancy I saw it on the brink of a precipice. If God gives us this little tribulation, (I say little, since excepting convenience of place, nothing is wanting to us,) it is a good sign; let us thank the Divine mercy for it."

But if fortitude is a great virtue, it is when accompanied by mildness and patience a heroic virtue. The archbishop of Turin, who well knew the learning, prudence, wisdom, and extraordinary virtues of this priest, often committed into his hands the most weighty and difficult affairs; and Sebastian endeavoured to despatch them with the most studious and exact diligence. Once, among other things, he committed to him the reform of one of the first monasteries, into which no trifling disorders had introduced themselves. He saw very plainly the awkwardness of the matter, but he nevertheless bowed his head and obeyed. The office was most embarrassing, and demanded great firmness for the bringing about the restoration of the observance of the rules: it demanded courage to resist the desires

and the will of the first persons in the state, to whose families the religious in question belonged; it demanded great patience to hear in peace the affronts and insults which he would have to receive; in short, it demanded a Sebastian. In these few words I say all that is necessary. Sebastian looked at nothing but God and the command he had received; he used gentleness, but at the same time great firmness in the removal of evil: he pointed out the scandal arising from the latter, and thence the necessity of returning to the original observance. As the wise virgins were at once ready to refer themselves to his wise counsel, so the foolish, alleging customs and privileges, persisted in their disposition to relaxation and disorder; nay, their perversity went so far, that opposing themselves, as it were, with open force to the physician who was labouring for their cure, they loaded him with affronts, being aided in this by their relations. Without staying to mention everything, (which could not be done,) I shall merely say that he had to suffer abuse and contumely such as would have shamed even the most wicked and abandoned of men. The persons referred to began with contemptuous and spiteful conduct, and with haughty and violent expressions, calling him a hypocrite, an impostor, a calumniator, a bigot, liar, a proud and wicked man; and not content with thus despising and outraging him, they defamed him as an ambitious person, who sought to domineer over and oppress them; affirming that under the mask of piety he was a devil; and adding a

thousand other things to bring upon him the hatred and contempt of all. And most certainly had not the servant of God been held in the estimation in which he was, his virtue being plainly manifest, these persons through the rage of calumny would have triumphed. Sebastian bore all with admirable patience, without excusing himself, without complaint, not rendering evil for evil; but raising his eyes to God, he thanked Him for having given him an occasion of being ill-treated, and of receiving evil for good for His sake. All he grieved at was the offence committed against God, to whom he made fervent supplication that he would change the hearts of the offenders and cure them of their unjust anger. Although thus outraged, contemned, and derided, he never ceased to labour at restoring order in the community, nor was he ever weary of loading with favours those religious in particular who were the cause and origin of the war made against him; which, violent as it was, could not make him desist from an undertaking which cost him many years of labour, affliction, and suffering.

Nor must it be supposed that his fortitude was in the least diminished by lapse of time, the contrary being proved by what he accomplished even in old age; on this subject we here give the deposition of one of our body, extracted from the process: "Father Sebastian Valfré, although an old man of almost eighty, laboured so much, that I myself, although young and robust, was tired in going with him, even though I

merely accompanied him. When I was describing his labours with expressions of admiration, to Father Carlo Andrea Cassina, the latter, on hearing of them, said to me weeping, 'I cannot retain my tears when I hear this servant of God mentioned, with whom from my youth I have been familiarly acquainted. I believe his whole life to have been miraculous. Now that he is very old, wasted, worn out with excessive exertions and sicknesses, he does indeed take some little repose; but at an earlier period, when he had not to attend any dying person, he passed his nights in continual study, reserving the day for hearing confessions, preaching, and for restoring peace in families; in short, for leading the life of an apostle. For my own part, I consider it as absolutely certain, that without a continual miracle, he could not have done so much, nor have reached his present age.'"

Neither are we by any means to suppose that the patient sufferance of injuries cost him little; for he was not of a cold temperament, but ardent in his nature, and very apt to feel resentment. It was not a labour of days or of months, but it was a warfare of eighteen successive years which he had to carry on against himself in the conquest of anger, which used to awake in his mind at the slightest shock. After a combat thus long, and not before it, was he able to assume so steady a dominion over this passion, that not even unforeseen disagreeable encounters any longer disturbed him, but he passed over the greatest clamour and abuse with a tranquil smile.

One morning he wished through devotion to say the votive mass of the Madonna: he gave the brother sacristan notice of this, that he might take out the suitable vestments. The latter refused to do so; and Valfré, who as superior could have obliged him to obedience, without losing the state of recollection in which he ever was before celebrating mass, opened not his lips except to utter these words merely: "Well, I will do as you please; I will say mass to-day as others do; the votive mass I will say another day." And thus it was to be. But the sacristan a little while after considering the matter, was aware of having done wrong, and he felt so much remorse that he went and threw himself at the feet of Sebastian begging him to pardon his disobedience and obstinacy.

In the same way he passed over whatever was done in contempt of his person, even in public. As he was one day going to visit a sick person, from the window of a house inhabited by some one who hated Sebastian, although he had received the greatest benefits from him, were poured upon him the contents of a vessel which left him covered from head to foot with filth. Silently, as if nothing had happened, without any act of resentment, he returned to the congregation to change his garments, strictly charging his companion not to say one word about the matter to any one, so that he who had "through inadvertency" (thus he expressed himself) cast upon him the defilement might have nothing to suffer. Does this seem a trifle?

I could here give innumerable other facts to excite admiration of his patience; but there would be no end to my task; in a whole year I could not relate everything. I shall briefly add a few more instances of it. Once as he was on his way to the prisons, seeing a large basket of most beautiful cherries, he bought them, and having them carried with him, he distributed them with his own hand to the prisoners. Now while with all charity he was making this distribution, some of the most disorderly of those receiving, as they ate the fruit, threw the stones at his head and in his face, he meanwhile pretending not to be aware of it. The priest Bertolomeo Quarello, guardian of the royal chapel of the most sacred Winding-sheet, was with him. Kindling with a just indignation on seeing the unworthy conduct of the wretched creatures, he could not keep himself from saying, "Are you not aware, Father Valfré, that these people are making game of you? Let us go away; these ungrateful beings do not deserve your kindness." All gentleness and patience, Sebastian replied, "No, no; let us not abandon these unhappy persons, who notwithstanding this are brethren of Jesus Christ: let us strive to gain them, they are only trying to amuse themselves a little, let us pity them; poor fellows, I am grieved for them." Quarello remained in astonishment at these words, and from that time considered the servant of God as truly a saint.

But that which appears altogether incredible, is the following circumstance. We have in sev-

eral chapters seen what was the nature of Sebastian's charity towards his neighbour. Now this same Sebastian, who never set a limit to this virtue, was one day in the hospital di Carita, when meeting with its director, the latter in the presence of many officials, seized with anger and rage, gave him a bitter rebuke, harshly reproaching him with having prevented the sovereign from giving an alms extraordinary to the hospital. Among other insults he said to him, "You understand nothing, you are an ignorant blockhead, and I greatly wonder that the king lends an ear to you and admits you into his confidence." Sebastian, who was not guilty of that with which he was charged, nay, who had not even had a hint of what had been done; Sebastian, who was no insignificant ecclesiastic, but a priest of mature age, with an infinity of merits through services rendered to the whole city, and to that very hospital, what will he do? nay, what might our saint even fairly do in like circumstances? Without giving offence to the rude and passionate man who addressed him, prove himself innocent. There would certainly have been nothing in so doing which would have been inconsistent with sanctity itself. But listen to a miracle of patience, mildness, humility. The director having thus given vent to his wrath, Sebastian, without uttering one word of anger or excuse, without changing his aspect or making any complaint, courteously and with most humble demonstrations took his leave.

Not much time had elapsed when God present-

ed the blessed man with an opportunity of taking vengeance according to the manner of saints. The director fell sick, and Sebastian immediately hastened to his house to visit him; and this he continued to do every day that the illness lasted, although he was never permitted to go in to see him. What a contrast is this between pride and humility, anger and patience, hatred and love!

The means which the blessed man employed to attain to this degree of patience, were the following. 1st, He accustomed himself to do good in every way to those, whoever they were, who offended him by words or deeds; whence he was often seen to give more liberal alms to those of the poor who had spoken to him abusively.

2nd, When he heard that satires were made against him, or sarcastic expressions used, even to the detriment of his reputation, he was silent, and desired that no one should undertake to defend him. His nephew, for a certain reason of his own, thought fit to write to him from Verduno, saying that no one there had spoken ill of him; Sebastian answered, "You tell me that no one in your country has said anything that could in any way prejudice my honour; I know not why you say this to me, never, if I recollect aright, having written anything to you on the subject. But whatever may have been your object in giving me this information, it is my wish that as often as you may hear ill spoken concerning me you say not one word in my defence, but let people

talk as they please. For I do not live so well as not often to give disgust and scandal to people, to whom it is my intention to make most humble acknowledgments for all my failings."

3rd, If at any time he had fallen into some trifling impatience, he at once accused himself of it in public, thinking that there was no more efficacious way of correcting himself than this. Once, on the morning of a feast, delivering a sermon to the brothers in the Oratory, he began thus: "My brethren, I wish to acquaint you with the scandal which I yesterday gave, from which you will know what sort of a heart I have. A poor woman asked a trifling alms of me; finding myself without another farthing, I told her that I had nothing to give her: she repeated her request, and I made her the same answer. The woman would not be content, but with increased earnestness went on repeating that she was in want, and moreover, pulling me by my cloak. Then, dearest brothers, inflamed with anger, partly because she would not be quiet, and partly because she held me by my garment, turning to her with a harsh aspect, I crossly answered, 'Have I not told you that I have nothing to give you? Let me go.' What do you say to this, my brethren? Seems it not to you a noble example to be given by a priest who preaches mildness and patience?" And he then went on to speak of this most serious fault (as he called it) with so much feeling that his hearers were moved by his words, and, together with him, melted into tears accompanied with sighs and

sobs, and were for some time unable to calm themselves.

I add one thing more in conclusion. He warmly recommended these virtues to all persons, assuring them that the practice of them was the sure way to arrive at perfection. He in a particular manner encouraged the afflicted and the sick to conformity to the will of God, saying, that the life of a good Christian reduces itself to a perfect accommodation of himself to the divine pleasure: that he who knows how to profit by his infirmities and tribulations, bearing them with patience, will make as much progress in virtue as any one. A religious was complaining because, owing to fever, to which she was subject, she could not perform the spiritual exercises; Sebastian, with his usual exclamation, said in answer, "A fine thing truly, for us to pretend to live as we please! Your indisposition may hinder you 'from joining the choir or uniting in other community acts, but not from being patient. Remember that patience is worth almost a hundred other virtues. From time to time during the day raise your eyes and heart to God, saying, 'O Lord, by giving me this malady, you prevent my doing what I have so long desired to do, I mean the holy exercises; may your holy name be blessed, and your most holy will done.' We have here in the congregation a father, who (for about twenty years) owing to his continual indispositions, has been unable to fulfil all the common observances; and he is indeed the edification of the community,

by the extreme patience with which he bears his sickness, and refers himself to the will of God. You must do the same." He then admonished all, saying, "You should accustom yourselves to bear in peace all the contradictions which every day present themselves to you; such as seeing your designs frustrated, inability to obtain what you desire, the finding yourselves deluded in your hopes, uncourteously treated, and a hundred like things which may happen with or without the fault of others. For he who can keep himself from being disturbed, and who can repress every opposing internal movement in these small things, beside acquiring great merit, (the opportunities of self-conquest being almost continual,) easily gains the victory in great things also, and is able to triumph over himself."

CHAPTER XVIII.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S PURITY.

I COME now to speak of that most distinguished virtue which renders man like to the angels, I mean virginal purity, a treasure of inestimable worth, and one which we are ever in danger of losing, both because we carry it in a vessel of the most fragile clay, and because we are always in danger of falling. Guarding it with the greatest diligence and solicitude, Sebastian was able through the whole course of his life to preserve it against all the allurements and snares

of that capital enemy, which from our being generated in concupiscence, we have within ourselves; an enemy who skilfully employs every art to rob us of this treasure. Every one knows how easy it is to lose a flower so beautiful, especially in those perilous years in which the force of the passions is usually more strongly experienced; but the Blessed Sebastian, both in his boyhood and youth, preserved his virginity spotless. Knowing how little intemperance in food or in wine accords with this virtue, he was ever very sparing both in eating and drinking. From childhood he began to practise abstinence; he lived on bread and a few herbs, but to avoid ostentation, he added some little morsel of more tasteful food; he drank very weak wine and water, and abstained even from soup. His abstinence being known by report, it was playfully said in Turin that "none but the rich could invite Valfré to dinner, because it was not every one that could go to the expense of buying the four things he required; namely, bread, water, salad, and fruit."

After the example of St. Paul, he chastised his body that he might not feel within himself a law opposing that of his spirit, afflicting his own flesh by rough hair-cloths and severe disciplines; of this ill treatment of his person (such was his caution in inflicting it) none were aware but a very few of those most in his confidence. What he could not succeed in concealing, was his rigorous custody of the senses, and in particular of the eyes, from which a greater

number and variety of impressions are received than from any other of the senses; and he therefore made with them the inviolable compact of holy Job, that of never allowing himself to look at dangerous objects; so that whenever he had to speak with women (which he never did without some one else being present) he kept his eyes either closed or turned in another direction, or else so disposed as not to rest anywhere; this practice he also observed in hearing women's confessions, as he said in confidence to his nephew, D. Marcantonio, advising him to do the same. I have said that he never spoke alone with women; for even when a woman had to confess in the church with closed doors, or in the Oratory, if there were no one in the house whom he could take with him, and cause to be present as long as the confession lasted, he called some poor person, and by giving him an alms obliged him to stay till he had finished, and the woman was gone. One day a lady came to inquire for him in order to ask counsel in some of her doubts. Sebastian being informed of this, went directly down to the porter's lodge, accompanied by Father Agostino Ainesio. The latter having perceived that the lady was indecorously habited, expected that the blessed man would, as usual, either oblige her to cover herself, or would turn away from her. But he did neither the one nor the other; he moreover stood speaking with her for a long time. When the woman was gone Father Agostino straightway asked him why he had this time overlooked an impropriety, and

had found no difficulty in conversing with a person who from her dress seemed to have no great affection for modesty and decorum. Sebastian, not knowing what to answer, because unwilling to make known how he had acted during the interview, after having thought a little, turned his virtue into a defect by saying, that from having been overpowered by sleep, he had not been aware of anything. His sleep had been the having kept his eyes continually shut; for a man not awake could not have given the wise counsels which he did give to the lady.

He could not bear the least familiarity of gesture from any person whatever; nor would he even suffer his hands or his habit to be touched, whether in joke, or as a mark of respect and affection. A niece of his, who had not seen him for many years, once when he went to Verduno came to meet him, and because she very much loved him, and reverenced him as a Saint, she was going to kiss his hand. But he resisted this, nor would he in any instance permit an act of this kind, becoming and reverent as it might be. This circumspection exercised by himself he desired should be exercised by others also, because (he would say) "the blows are frequent and strong enough not only to make persons lose their steadiness, but even fall down fatal precipices."

It was the opinion of Sebastian that in regard to a point of so great importance, it became all persons to observe great and diligent caution, a caution which to the admirers of modern manners, may possibly have the appearance of inci-

vility, scrupulosity, and excessive rigour; but he who recollects that a breath is sufficient to tarnish a crystal, that a lily slightly touched loses its freshness, deems not vigilance to be excessive where the mischief is excessive; where stumbling is extremely easy, and the fall most dreadful. On this account he anxiously recommended that young persons should not be left much together, that people should converse with the humble only and the well ordered, and that they should talk of those things only which tend to edification: that brothers even in the age of childhood should not play with their sisters, and that even the caressing of animals should be abstained from: all which things, not attended to by parents, or despised as follies, very frequently lead to serious evils. He would not have women leave the house unaccompanied by a respectable and trusty person; nor when sick would he have them receive visits alone, even from the physician or surgeon; neither would he have them learn singing or music, or anything belonging to science or letters from men, unless in the presence of their parents, who, in this case, ought to trust no person whatever. Finally, he desired that no part of the person should be left uncovered, and on this point his zeal knew no limit. He removed from the confessional and from the eucharistic table even the most noble ladies, if they dared to present themselves indecorously habited, rejecting every excuse which they might make, such as the extreme heat, or the reigning fashion. Meet-

ing one of his nieces in a public and much frequented street, and it seeming to him that her dress was deficient in modesty, he took out his hankerchief and threw it to her, although she was at some distance, telling her to cover herself better, which she did without making any reply. He mortified yet more one of his sisters for having come from Verduno to Turin in time of war, while Piedmont was full of troops. She having come to our house, asked to see her brother, who, on hearing of her arrival, shuddered with horror at the danger in which she had placed herself on the road; and although she was not a very young woman, he sent her a severe reproof, and for a long time would not see her. At length, several persons of authority having interposed, on condition that she would at once return home, he suffered himself to be persuaded to speak with her, but only once; and in the few moments of the interview, he did nothing but reprove her for having incautiously and rashly undertaken the journey in such circumstances; and dismissing her mortified and instructed, he sent her back accompanied by persons fearing God and worthy of trust.

Nor did the terrible evil caused to souls by the immodesty of figures, either in sculpture or painting, escape the ardent zeal of this blessed man; whence he studiously applied himself to the correction of this evil also. He recommended a certain cavalier to remove some indecent busts from a staircase on which they had been placed as an ornament. Having seen

that a friend of his had a costly snuff-box on which there was an immodest miniature, he asked him for it, and broke it before his face. In the house of this same gentleman Sebastian one day perceived hung against the wall of his study a piece of alabaster with a disgusting figure in relief, which being covered with crystal and surrounded with the richest ornament, was on this account much esteemed by its owner, who valued it extremely, both for the sake of the material employed and the delicacy of the art bestowed upon it; the good father at first manifested great disturbance of spirit, and then with holy freedom frankly said, that on no consideration should such a work, whatever might be its worth in one respect, be seen in a Christian house; and that he felt himself beyond measure scandalized at it. Now while he was saying these things, and while the owner was standing in suspense as to the removal or non-removal of the piece, since, on the one hand, he would have liked to gratify Sebastian, knowing that he spoke the truth, but on the other, had not sufficient resolution to deprive himself of a master-piece, the latter, without being touched, fell to the ground and broke into a thousand fragments, to the amazement of all present, every one of them attributing the occurrence to hidden and supernatural power; for the nail on which the piece was hung, was not in the least bent, and was perfectly firm in the wall, beside being large enough to sustain a much heavier weight.

Another thing which the Blessed Sebastian

had greatly at heart, was the decorum of weddings, often preceded by illicit courtships, and for the most part contaminated on the day of their celebration by equivocal expressions and immodest discourse. On this subject a letter written by him to the physician, Pompeo Bertolotti, on occasion of his marriage, deserves to be read, and we therefore give it here: "As at the marriage of Cana Jesus and Mary were visibly present, so I hope that at your nuptials they will be invisibly present to give them their blessing. I feel assured that the modesty of the two persons principally concerned, no less than that of the guests, will on this day be exemplified, every one recollecting that the Son of God chose to ennoble the conjugal state by raising it to the divine excellence of a sacrament, and calling to mind also that in the espousals of Christians, the Church recognises her own espousals with Jesus. At table amid the common mirth, let each one from time to time reflect that the Institutor of marriage is through his immensity there present, and that he has to give to Him a strict account of every word, and of every the minutest act which is not according to His most holy law. In this way will the day be one of real gladness; for then only will you be truly joyous, when you do well; in sin, none can find true happiness. In the next place, in order that God may ever more load you with His benedictions, forget not the poor. I would like, that to one at least his dinner should be given, because alms above all things are most

grateful to God. Thus will everything happen to His glory, and without spiritual injury to those assembled, who in a particular manner will share in the prayers which on the day in question I shall have made in the Church." Bertolotti, who although a young man, was a true Christian, read the letter to all the guests, who did not depart in the least from the admonitions therein expressed; and Count Girolamo Romagnano di Virle, the most noble person present at the banquet, with his own hand selected the better part of each dish, and sent it to some poor persons who had been expressly bidden to come, nor during the whole day was mirth ever parted from modesty. Happy the weddings which are thus celebrated! God blesses them from heaven, and thence the persons united pass their life in unanimity and perfect peace. Through the divine benediction, it follows that from the impulse of a supernatural charity, the husband wills that his wife should share all he possesses, and studies to procure for her the true riches of grace and virtue; in return he receives from her cordial affection for being sensible that she is loved and cared for, she gives her love to him alone; and thus of two persons there is but one flesh, of two souls but one spirit, which through identity of will and indivisible affection, lives in both. The reciprocal assurance of their perpetual union and fidelity tenderly preserved by each in regard to the other, and the mutual respect thence arising, causes each to repose with tranquillity and with a pleasing satisfaction on the

known kindness of the other, without fearing lest any foreign regard should interrupt or chill their affection. Then as to their children, should it please God to send them any, both parents place their whole care and solicitude in them. Hence follows a well considered and prudent education; hence, affectionate diligence and energy in the promotion of their real good, and consequently, the prosperity and happiness of their offspring, who absorb all their affections, thoughts, and study; beyond their beloved family, the parents care for nothing, love nothing, wish for nothing, finding in it and in the enjoyment of their common blessings, perfect cheerfulness, sweet repose, mutual aid, continual peace, a terrestrial paradise. But how is all this good to be enjoyed, how are celestial benedictions to be hoped for, when both the man and the woman, prepare for marriage beneath a load of enormous sins, never considering in their approach to this great sacrament, nay, perhaps not even knowing that the principal design of God in the institution of matrimony, was not the satisfaction of the flesh, but the possession of rational human creatures, who through faith, may know and love Him, may be participants in sanctifying grace, be rendered just, the friends, that is, and sons of God, in the present life; and from this life may pass to the enjoyment of Him in perfect beatitude in His eternal kingdom. But what! Do not persons spend the very day on which they receive this great sacrament in offending God, using their lips only to utter what is im-

modest and to commit excess in eating and drinking, without giving one thought to him who is dying of hunger? What wonder if to these beginnings succeed suspicions, disputes, bitternesses, discords, wrath, jealousies, whence after the lapse of a few days the husband cannot live in peace with the wife, nor the wife bear with the husband! Nay, what wonder is it if these persons at length come to break asunder, or certainly to loosen the sacred and venerable bond made by the hands of their Creator, a bond which as we have said, was of two to make but one flesh, and which Christ fastened and secured with indissoluble firmness! There are but too many who at this day fail in a point of so vast importance, one on which depends the welfare of families, states, kingdoms, and of the world itself; one single marriage being capable of producing the subversion and ruin of public security and tranquillity; wherefore I beg the reader not to charge it to me as a fault that I have here made a little digression.

But if Sebastian used every effort to prevent evils of this kind in persons living in the world, it may easily be imagined how much he studied that in our congregation, the angelic virtue of which we speak, should escape, I say not offence, but the shadow even of offence, whence he guarded it with the utmost diligence even from the remotest dangers. In speaking either in private or in public he could not utter a word respecting the vice in question, which he desired should never be named, saying, that as it cannot be

overcome but by flight, so it must be combated by indirect means; by putting, that is, into the minds of hearers the holy fear of God, and a horror of sin in general, without anything further.

Our institute requires that for the instruction of those who hear confessions, some one should every day after dinner propose a doubt, or rather a case of conscience, to which all the rest if they please answer, making their own observations; and in this way the question is resolved. Now in this useful exercise Sebastian never even permitted that the subject in question should be treated on; and lest any one, through inadvertence, should fall upon it, he gave previous command that, in such case, no one was to answer. In like manner, when masons, carpenters, or other workmen were in the house, if he ever heard from them one word that did not sound well to his most chaste ears, he instantly imposed silence on the culprit; a thing, which to say the truth, happened most rarely; for he ever maintained so great modesty in manner, and gravity in demeanour, that the mere sight of him filled every one with reverence. His every act, look, and gesture beamed with the grace of perfect modesty. In short, in what regarded purity, this servant of God took notice even of things of no account, so that an angel having a human body, could not have shown himself a more jealous lover of this virtue.

The extreme abhorrence in which he held immodesty did not however cause him to abhor the person defiled by it; on the contrary, with

persons of this description he manifested the utmost kindness and compassion; treating them with mildness, he gave them consolation, and led them to amendment and virtue. Whenever they came to him in the tribunal of penance he felt his heart melt, and he received them with the affection of a father; and recommending to them nothing but devotion to the Virgin Mary, he made them join in heart in this very short prayer, which, with sentiments of the purest affection and fervour, he himself repeated: "Obtain for me by your intercession, O most pure Virgin, holy purity, so that you may never have to turn away your eyes from me; obtain for me, O most pure Virgin, holy purity, that I may begin to taste the sweetness of heavenly things, and that the disorderliness of earthly things may be disgusting to me; obtain for me, O most pure Virgin, holy purity, that I may one day be made worthy to approach to kiss your most holy feet in Paradise, into which none can enter who is defiled by loathsome corruptions. Remember, O most pure Virgin, that if you obtain not this grace for me, one of your sons will have to be the object of your hatred, and to suffer with the devils to all eternity. O most tender Mother, you who are the refuge of sinners, take compassion on me, and obtain for me, by your intercession, so precious a virtue from God."

This love of purity, which the Blessed Sebastian exhibited during life, he manifested no less after his death, by procuring it for those devoted to him. A nun of holy life was continually

provoked by the devil and instigated to evil by wicked thoughts and foul suggestions, particularly after the most holy communion, which caused her to be in constant disturbance and anxiety. With great faith she had recourse by prayer to God for aid; she afflicted her body with austerities, and used every means and every care to remove from herself these thoughts, which tormented her almost continually. One morning, (she was at that time making the spiritual exercises,) after her meditation, retiring into her cell, she found herself still more beset by impure temptations, through which she again fell into her usual depression of spirit; but on this occasion God put it into her mind to have recourse to the intercession of Valfré. She immediately knelt down and began to pray to him with the most lively sentiments of confidence, that he would curb and break the force of the enemy, and would give her vigour and firmness to oppose him and to come off with the victory, so that being rescued from her present state of torment, she might enjoy peace of heart. This short prayer being ended, on rising to her feet she found herself consoled to a degree which, as she said to her confessor, she knew not how to express in words. But what was most worthy of admiration was this, that from that time to the end of her life she never more experienced these diabolical instigations.

But singular in every point was the conversion of a gentlewoman who, by her beauty and flatteries, had seduced many among the young,

giving great scandal, and dragging souls to perdition. This person passed many years in disorderly practices, thinking of anything rather than of her soul; at length it pleased God to touch her heart by divine grace, and beginning to feel remorse and to see the deformity of sin, she now wished to change her life; but long habits of sin had so bound and fettered her that she could not shake them off, but was continually involved in iniquity. One day in which perhaps God caused her to hear His voice more sensibly, she deliberated on recommending herself morning and evening to Valfré, saying in honour of him three Paternosters and three Ave Marias, to the end that, having exercised so many charities to so many persons during his life, he might (now that he was in Paradise) be pleased to perform an act of charity in her favour, by taking her out of the mire in which she was overwhelmed; being confident that if he assisted her she should be able to make such resistance to her enemy that she could not fail to obtain a perfect victory. The Blessed Valfré was prompt to aid her; he put into her mind such a dread and horror of the crimes of which she was guilty, that at the end of three days she renounced the vanities and pleasures of sense, condemned herself to a hard, laborious, and abject life; and dedicating herself to the service of the poor and of the sick, she expended all she had upon them; so that she, who a little before had been the scandal and ruin of so many, despising the jests and derision of the world, became the edification and example of all.

CHAPTER XIX.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S PRUDENCE.

Christian prudence, a thing so valuable and necessary, without which we cannot live aright, is that which knows how to discover, arrange, and put in operation the means which bring us to the accomplishment of the end proposed. It was this great virtue, the rule and the mistress of all the rest, which taught the Blessed Sebastian ever to impart wise and most just counsel, and which enabled him to find so many subtle expedients and devices for the removal and eradication of vice from the heart, and for the introduction of virtue in its place. Although extremely learned and holy, he had nevertheless the utmost diffidence in himself, so that he never did anything, neither went to the court, nor mounted the pulpit, nor seated himself in the confessional, nor received a novice, without first recommending himself with his whole heart to God, the Father of lights, and to the most holy Virgin Mary, the seat of wisdom; nor in important affairs did he ever fail to learn the opinion of men of virtue and knowledge. When counsel was asked of him he never answered with precipitation, but taking time and offering up, as usual, fervent prayers, he applied himself to the minute examination of the thing in question, maturely deliberating on the means of

knowing the truth, discovering error, and determining the bounds of the lawful and the becoming. In this he happily succeeded, not through mere natural light, (which even supposing it to be very great, being often obscured by the passions, frequently misleads us,) but through the spiritual light which he acquired by means of prayer, this (be it repeated) being the beginning of all his works; with which light a man can, without the corrupt policy of the world, direct himself and others to what is good, according as justice, charity, and duty require.

When in the year 1676 the Duchess Regent, as was said in the third chapter, informed him by means of the abbé Amorotti, the grand almoner, that the Duke her son, then eleven years of age, had selected him as his confessor, Sebastian was overwhelmed with confusion, and sought every means of declining this honourable office; but his humility perceiving that every effort failed, prudence suggested to him not merely to offer many prayers himself, and have them offered by others, but also to take the advice of all who at that time were in repute for sanctity and learning, both within and without Turin, submitting himself at the same time to the will of the superiors of the Congregation, laying open to them his reasons for not taking on himself so important a charge. He wrote a long letter to the Father Superior and the Father Deputies, most humbly begging them to show him how he ought to act in a point so important. "Spiritus Sancti gratia," he thus wrote

to him, "illuminet sensus et corda vestra." "My incapacity for the direction of a soul that is one day to govern a state, the danger of an office so delicate and arduous, little permitted by our institute, which wills not that we should intermeddle much in courts or have much to do with the great, persuade me not to accept the heavy charge which it is wished should be laid on me; and the more, because as being one of the oldest members of our body, I ought to be a more exact observer than others of the least even of our rules, in order to avoid giving bad example. Nevertheless, I declare myself unwilling to act from myself, wishing blindly to refer myself to your charity, wisdom, and prudence; may you well consider what is best to be done, and tell it me openly; I, on my part, shall gladly execute it, certain as I am that God by your means will let me know what is His will." And here, going on to say much of his own ignorance and want of experience, he adds, "I write to you, having, as I have said, resolved to refer myself entirely to your judgment, whatever advice others may have given me. Prostrate before you I beseech you to have that same compassion on me which you would yourselves desire in a similar position; take care so to decide as not one day to have to repent of your decision: have nothing in view but the glory of God and the good of my soul: I give myself up as dead into your hands; I warmly recommend myself to your prayers; and be it known to you that I find myself at this moment so disturbed, that I cannot even have

recourse to God as I ought in an hour in which I stand in so great need of His assistance."

In admonition and correction also Sebastian manifested great prudence; for correction to produce good effect must not always be made openly. One day in passing through a street he heard a young man who seemed to be of respectable birth, uttering expressions far from decorous. Our Blessed Sebastian, who had never before seen him, turning towards him with kindness, saluted him as if he had been on familiar terms with him; and as if not displeased at his scandalous language went on his road. Having however gone a few steps further, turning back, he called the youth to him, and pretending that he had some request to make of him, he made him feel, when alone with himself, the impropriety of his expressions, and this with so good a grace, that the offender parted from him repentant, but not in the least irritated.

Another time happening to see a soldier talking with a person of suspicious character, Sebastian fearing that God might be offended, approached the man, saying to him in a friendly tone, "I pray you, my dear brother, not to be offended;" he then turned to the person with him, and reprimanded her with so much zeal and ability, that, much mortified, she went away; nor did the soldier on being left alone give any sign of anger or resentment, being gained and subdued by the kindness of manner with which Valfré took leave of him.

Let not the reader wonder on seeing that

Sebastian's corrections neither exasperated nor provoked those to whom they were addressed; he may however be surprised, (and that very reasonably,) to hear that in correcting, this blessed servant of God never spoke with warmth, (corrections made at such a moment, for the most part, provoke to resentment, hatred, and revenge,) but always in perfect calmness of spirit; and then with what mildness and grace did he not approach the guilty! Now by a smile, now by some pleasantry or joke, he prepared the way for the medicine, which thus being sweetened lost all its bitterness. Let fathers and mothers of families learn a lesson from this, a most happy effect will be seen to attend their corrections if they do not make them the moment their child commits a fault, but wait till passion having subsided gives way to reason; if they repress every movement of vexation or anger, (correction mingled with abuse, anger, and threats being no remedy, but poison,) regarding in the child's fault not an offence against themselves, but either a sin against God, or a want of good education; if in a discreet and affectionate manner they show him his error, endeavouring to bring him to amendment; if they make him sensible that they speak not from indignation, but from love of virtue, the offence, not the offender displeasing them; if, in short, they are ever guided in their admonitions and chastisements by love, their movements and their language will be such as not to alienate from themselves the mind of him who receives the admonition or

chastisement, but to gain and ever more attach it to them. But how is the least benefit to be derived from corrections made in our days, if they seem not those of a father, but of a tyrant, who seeks rather to make himself hated than feared? What blindness, what folly, what presumption is this! But let us go on to see Sebastian's prudence in other instances.

A certain priest, whether through need or from not being sufficiently endued with the ecclesiastical spirit, had contrived (so it was rumoured) to get a legacy left him by a rich friend of his, to the prejudice of the heirs, who throughout Turin were murmuring loudly at this. Valfré was deeply grieved at this affair on account of the scandal it gave, and he set himself seriously to consider if there were any means of removing or repairing the mischief. After having thought for some time, and not having failed to employ that powerful agent by which a holy violence is done even to our God, I mean prayer, his great charity, directed by prudence, put it into his heart to have the spiritual exercises given him for a few days by the very priest who had given rise to the evil report, and on that occasion to do what he had already devised. Having embraced this expedient, he at once went in search of the priest, and having found him, began with great humility to make his request. The priest on hearing it was perfectly amazed, not being able to conceive how he could apply to him for so holy a work, as he neither possessed the necessary discernment or sanctity, and acknow-

ledging his own unfitness, he told him that he could not do what he wished. Sebastian however, who was seeking to heal, not to be healed, was able so to act and speak, that the priest was at length obliged to yield to him and to condescend to his prayers and entreaties. That he might know what meditation he was making, what inspirations he had, and that he might make the spiritual conference with him, the priest began to go twice a day to Sebastian, who rendered him a minute account of every thing, telling him not only what we have mentioned, but also how he had passed every moment of the day. One day when the exercises were already drawing to a close, Valfré told him he had made the meditation on the detachment which a priest ought to have from property, and on the obligation under which he lies to remove even the least occasion of murmur and scandal; and here he began to speak with so much zeal and fervour, being assisted by the grace of God, that he who was acting as director opened his eyes, and being aware of his fault, said, "These holy exercises, Father Valfré, have been more serviceable to me than to you; I will soon put a stop to this talk concerning me, by at once sending back the legacy to the heirs of the deceased." He kept this resolution, and if the Blessed Sebastian had grieved at hearing of the fall of a priest, he was not a little consoled on seeing him rise again.

In hearing confessions Sebastian exercised a most holy discretion suggested by prudence, re-

membering that by God Himself the yoke of the Gospel is called sweet, and the burden of the Divine law light. He was not accustomed to load penitents, (particularly the first times that they presented themselves to him,) with mortifications, nor with many spiritual instructions, but prescribed for their right conduct a few truly good and solid rules, all conformed to the vocation, condition, and age of the person in question; hence, all remained perfectly satisfied with him, not finding what he prescribed either above their strength or excessive in itself.

A nun who over agitated by scruples was in continual fear of not having been well understood by her confessor, wrote to the Blessed Sebastian, asking for a prompt remedy for her agitation. Sebastian, ever guided by prudence, sought not to act as her master, prescribing prayers, penances, and other things of the kind, but simply told her to open her mind to her confessor, and to refer herself to him, it mattering not if it seemed to her that she experienced no relief. "Be conducted by him," these are his words, "as an infant by its mother, chase away every fear, and remain in peace. At all events you may be sure that God will not reprove you for having regulated yourself by his judgment, and therefore (I repeat it) refer yourself entirely to him, and hold it as certain, that when it shall please God your Reverence will experience consolation and comfort." To another nun who also consulted him, he wrote thus: "You have committed a great

error in disciplining yourself even to blood, against the judgment of your confessor. The devil suffers more than you without drawing any benefit from his torments, they being the effect of his disobedience. From this time proceed differently. As long as you do your own will, suffer what you please, you will never gain any merit with God. One Paternoster devoutly recited through obedience is worth above a hundred disciplines to blood made through caprice. Discipline your passions, be more humble and gentle; this is the sure road that leads to Paradise."

Whoever knows a little even of courts, knows too the dangers encountered in them, and the circumspection which must be observed in the laying open of abuses and the application of remedies, if the favour of the prince and of his courtiers is not to be lost. Now neither Victorius Amadeus, nor the presidents of the senate or of the chamber, nor the other magistrates ever disregarded the Blessed Valfré; nay, they ever willingly listened to him, even when he took in hand the purification of their souls, or opposed himself to their devices; they likewise favoured him in all his designs, precisely because they saw that he was just in his aims, wise in his direction, solicitous for nothing but the glory of God and the spiritual good of his neighbour, without ever asking or desiring anything either for himself, his most indigent relations, or his congregation, although the latter was in want of many things, and was beyond measure dear to him.

How great was the satisfaction of the royal princesses in him! They were both already formed to virtue by nature, education, and grace; but with noble expedients and holy assiduity he knew how to animate them to even greater progress, inclining them to the frequentation of the sacraments, to daily meditation, to spiritual communion, and to the practice, so much recommended by him, of ejaculatory prayer. I go not very far from the truth in saying, that amid the grandeurs of the court these sisters were as devout, fervent, and mortified, as if they had been two novices in the poverty of a monastery. Neither in recreation, in the chase, nor in places of amusements, did they ever in the least deviate from their virtuous and exemplary line of conduct, sanctifying their diversions, and from time to time raising their minds from terrestrial things to the contemplation of the celestial. It is good that the reader should learn from a letter written by the Blessed Sebastian to Maria Adelaide (one of the princesses) who was enjoying the pleasures of the country, how, even while they were amusing themselves, he sought their sanctification. He writes thus: "Most serene highness. On your return, I trust to find you much advanced in the road to perfection. In the country you have as many spiritual teachers as there are creatures before your eyes, all which declare without speaking, 'God has made us for the good of man;' every plant, every flower, every bird, every beast, repeats the same thing. What bursts of love will not your highness send

forth to the Creator! What fervent ejaculations will you not continually repeat! What thanks will you not render to God for so many benefits! What acts of humiliation will you not make amid the grandeurs around you! Daily hearing mass, I am quite assured that you will make a spiritual communion, afterwards occupying yourself for at least a quarter of an hour, in some devout meditation on the immense favour you have received from God. I suggest these things to you, although I feel persuaded that you are disposed to do even more than I say; therefore without troubling you further," &c.

And because with all persons, as we have elsewhere said, the Blessed Sebastian was in the highest esteem, bishops, rectors, and priests of every rank had recourse to him, as to an oracle, seeking his counsel for the secure direction of their life. He encouraged all to labour in the vineyard of the Lord, according to each one's talent and strength, without taking any notice of the idle talk of some persons, who not unfrequently censure and deride pious labourers: but while he excited them to declaim with vigour and to inveigh against vice, he exhorted them to proceed with much self-restraint in regard to the vicious, shutting their eyes to many things. He desired that they should not take any part in civil administrations, nor interfere (except indeed to restore peace) in disputes, nor meddle with domestic interests. He told rectors that if they wished to be respected by their parishioners, they must keep aloof

from dinners and evening entertainments in the houses of seculars, courteously thanking those who invited them; a practice observed by the great archbishop and doctor, S. Ambrogio, and which he desired should be observed by all his priests. He warned them to abhor avarice as a pestilence; and desired that when they were obliged to maintain the rights of their parish, they should on these occasions be more liberal in their alms and increase in some way the dignity and splendour of the house of God. And in speaking of this, struck with deep grief, he was often heard to sigh, saying that it was a grievous disorder for the priest to have splendid furniture in his own house, while the altars and vestments of the church were neglected. He desired that the rector should not be precipitate, but should ever act with due consideration, seeking light from God to secure him from error; that when called to the assistance of a soul, he should be ready to go with equal haste to the house of the rich or of the poor; that although he might know correction to be useless, he should not omit it, but should even employ some friend of the guilty person to admonish him; and if this were not sufficient, he should inform his superiors; that he should diligently watch over fathers and mothers having daughters of an age to marry, to prevent their permitting young men entering their houses, and thus save them from inconveniences which are the ruin of families: that on Sundays he should never omit giving instruction to children; nay,

that in this he should be extremely vigilant, studying in every way to get them to come willingly, and to behave with modesty; and to this end he should endeavour to have little rewards to give to the most diligent and attentive; that on some feast days he should give instruction in the catechism to adults also, more ignorance often existing in them than in children; that he should be assiduous in the confessional, taking care not to lose time there with the falsely devout; that he should be exact in giving the sacraments to the sick, not waiting till the evil was irremediable; that in carrying the viaticum, he should be mindful to do so with great decorum and with many lights, rendering honour to the Master of all, who will know how to recompense him abundantly; that he should take care that he who contracts the bond of matrimony be instructed in the things necessary to be known by every Christian, and in the obligations which that state brings with it to those embracing it; that he should every day give a little time to study, in order to render himself more capable of aiding souls: that his dress should be respectable and always in good order, but without affectation; and, finally, that he should avoid disputes with confraternities, usually extremely jealous of their customs, although they may not always be laudable, in the abolition of which many rectors have laboured to no purpose; that in case of any serious defect in these bodies, he should seek to repair it with charity and Christian prudence, so as not to draw upon himself

the hatred of the seculars, and make them lose their devotion, which he should on the contrary do everything to cherish, augment, and bring to perfection.

To the Bishop of Alba, Giuseppe Rovero, who asked of him counsels of prudence for his own conduct in the government of his diocese, he said that a bishop ought, above all things, to attend to his own sanctification, and unweariedly ask light from God that his works may be an example to others, and that he may know how to correct, and to bring back into the right way him who has deviated from it. To this end he should propose to himself as a model some holy bishop, as St. Charles Borromeo, or St. Francis of Sales, frequently reading his Life. He must next attentively watch over all the priests, but in a special manner over the rectors, to know if they do their duty, and particularly if they are diligent and assiduous in teaching the catechism, without which the people will never know what the law of God is; he is not to admit priests who are too young to hear confessions, but those only who are of mature age, and who besides having the requisite knowledge, are of well-ordered and exemplary life; obliging them according to the practice in Rome, to perform every two years the spiritual exercises. In visiting his diocese he is not to content himself with making ordinances and decrees, but is to take care that they are observed and put in execution; he is to be careful on the same occasion that his domestics ask nothing

of the rectors; should he in any place find a youth discovering good dispositions and talents, he ought to place him in the seminary, ever recollecting that the latter is to be his first thought. He is never to enter into disputes for mere punctilios; but is nevertheless to contend firmly and courageously when the divine worship is concerned. He must take great care of the sick poor, both in the hospital and in their own dwellings, being watchful that they be attended with all charity and diligence by good confessors; and moreover that nothing be wanting to them even in what regards the health of the body. He is to keep watch over the administration of the property of pious places; to be very thoughtful of the prisoners, and sometimes to visit them personally; to endeavour to know the wants of all; and to this end he must give audience to all, seeking promptly to despatch the business of strangers, for the reason elsewhere given, namely, that such persons may not be forced to incur useless expense by being detained longer than necessary. Above all things, Sebastian recommended to the bishop to take care that none of his friends should try to make him do anything which might turn to the prejudice of his reputation; such as interesting themselves to have some one ordained who might not seem to be called by God to the priesthood; finally, he desired that he should spare no pains in tracing out the lost sheep, which when he had found he should, in imitation of the good Shepherd, affectionately lay on his shoulders, never

losing courage, but still confiding in God amid all the obstacles which he might have to encounter in reconducting it to the fold. In conclusion, the bishop is to have some pious and prudent priest, who is bound to mention to him his own faults and those also which are committed in the government of the bishopric. These and other similar counsels, which for the sake of brevity are not separately specified, the Blessed Sebastian gave to serve as a rule for every bishop.

To conclude, to his prudence may also be attributed the care he took that the noble and wealthy should avoid idleness; ever repeating that it is the peculiar property of idleness to spoil everything, just as water become stagnant breeds worms, and a house long uninhabited falls into ruin; and adding to this what Scripture says, that merely to do nothing is to learn a thousand vices. On this account he desired that ladies (even if queens) should watch over the welfare of their households, and should do some work suitable to their condition, such as preparing vestments for churches, linen for hospitals, &c.; and that men should copy the Lives of the Saints, or learned writings, &c.

CHAPTER XX.

THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN KNOWS THINGS HIDDEN, PREDICTS THINGS FUTURE, AND CURES SOME PERSONS MIRACULOUSLY.

Although in the course of this Life some facts have been already related, from which it is evident in how great a degree the Blessed Sebastian had received from God the gift of penetrating the thoughts of others, of knowing hidden and of predicting future things; nevertheless, having now to speak expressly on this subject, we shall relate other facts, from which it will be still better seen that he was in possession of this supernatural virtue and divine gift.

Going frequently to preach at the monastery of S. Croce, in every sermon he bewailed the wretched state of one who, approaching the tribunal of penance, is silent concerning grievous sins. In treating on this subject such was his assiduity that the nuns were tired of hearing him; and the more so because it seemed to them that such sermons were not suited to convents. The most virtuous among them were of opinion that he did this to humble himself, as if wishing to make others believe that he could not find another subject on which to discourse. In one instance, having gone on the appointed day to preach the sermon to these religious, notice being

given to the community, Sister Orsola Neirotti, who was at that moment in the garden with another lay-sister, said with some little resentment, "This good father will make us hear again to-day the usual sermon on those who commit sacrilege by maliciously concealing sins in confession. Is this a fit sermon for nuns? Do you think that there can be any one in a monastery who could go so far as to commit these excesses, abusing the sacraments?" At these words the other nun, sending forth a deep sigh and bursting into tears, replied, "Would that it were not so; but I, I am the person guilty of this most grievous offence: this very day however I will put an end to it, and escape from this state of torture; I will this very day make a general confession, and thoroughly set in order the affairs of my conscience." This being said they both went to the place where the discourse was usually given. The nuns were expecting to hear Valfré speak on the accustomed subject, when he began, "When a soul which through a diabolical temptation has maliciously concealed a sin in confession, being conquered by the grace of God, makes a firm determination to change its life and to make a good confession, O how excellent is the resolution it makes! Happy soul! O how great consolation will it experience in opening its mind to the priest! What rejoicing will there not be for it in Paradise! How will the demons in hell be consumed with rage!" And thence throughout the sermon he went on to treat of the felicity of him who is truly reconciled with God; and

from that time he was never heard again in that monastery to say one word either of ill-made confessions or of sacrileges.

Sister Anna Rattera of the same monastery a few days before receiving the sacred habit, in confessing to the servant of God, overcome by shame, concealed from him that on the preceding evening she had exceeded a little in drinking; of which, although she knew that it had only been a slight act of intemperance, still not having accused herself, on leaving the confessional she did not know whether or no to approach to holy communion. While in this trouble of conscience Valfré let her know that he must speak to her. Immediately returning to him in the confessional, she heard him say to her, "Had I yesterday evening exceeded a little in wine, I should certainly not have said the holy mass this morning without having first confessed my fault." The sister, seeing that her omission and her doubt were known to him, was easily able to conquer her repugnance and to confess her sin.

Sister Maria Rosa Denacona of the Most Holy Crucifix, having gone into the choir to visit the Sacrament, saw Valfré at the little grate at which the nuns communicate, making a sign that he wished to speak to her. Both having gone into the parlour, he asked her if she desired that he should discover to her her defects; and the religious answering that she should be glad for him to do so, he at once manifested them to her, knowing them through a supernatural light, for they were all interior, nor had she ever mention-

ed them to any one, nay, she had not herself been aware of them.

Sister Maria Delfina Bertoglia of St. Palagia, being with other sisters in the work-room, having heard that Valfré was come to preach, said with a little impatience, "Bless this Father Valfré! he might come at some other hour; we have something else to do now than to go to hear him!" In spite however of all these lamentations, leaving everything she went with her companions into the church. But how did she and her companions blush when they heard the Blessed Sebastian begin his discourse with "Bless this Father Valfré, he might come at some other hour; we have something else to do now than go to hear him!" and then after having said other things on the subject, he added, that the next time, if they were busy, they must let him know, and he would then defer his visit to a more convenient season.

In another monastery, a nun being alone in her room, and a sweetmeat coming in her way she ate it without reflecting; and Valfré having come the same morning, she went to confession. After receiving absolution she asked, as she was accustomed to do, if she could communicate. "No," replied the Blessed Valfré, "you cannot communicate this morning, for you are not fasting; do you not recollect eating a sweetmeat?"

But without staying to repeat all the cases of this nature which occurred in monasteries, I shall relate that only which is found at the end of the juridical examination of Sister Clara

Andrea Garagna, of St. Clara. "It was generally believed by us here that the Venerable Sebastian Valfré was endued by our Lord with supernatural lights for knowing the interior of hearts; whence many of our religious, as I heard in confidence from them, were careful not to fail in anything through fear that the servant of God might admonish them either publicly in preaching or secretly in some other way; and I too for this same reason was very attentive to all my duties." And Sister Maria Delfina, the same who is mentioned above, said the same thing in the process. "Independently of its having happened to myself to hear repeated to me the very words which I had uttered in the work-room, (it was humanly impossible that he should have learnt them from any one, the sisters who heard me never having moved from my side till the sermon was finished,) I say that the common persuasion of us all was, that the servant of God saw our defects, and we were thence accustomed frequently to admonish each other to mind what we were about, for that Father Valfré knew everything, and would correct us in his sermons."

This divine privilege of Sebastian's was not limited to monasteries. The priest, Filippo Maria Occhis, the royal chaplain, attests that Valfré one day begged him to take some money to a baker's shop. On going to it he found there a woman of middle age, on observing whose countenance the thought occurred to him that she was a person of bad life. He did not however persist

in this notion, and having fulfilled his commission, he returned to Valfré, who on seeing him, said, "Be it known to you that this person is a good woman." Occhis was in astonishment at hearing these words, not having manifested his thoughts to any one.

A peasant of Verduno, hearing of the abundant alms given by Sebastian, left his home and went to Turin. Before entering the city he thought it well to take off the good clothes he had on, and so having left them at the inn near to the church of St. Salvador, without the Porta Nuova, he presented himself to Valfré half dressed and half naked, hoping thus to move him to greater compassion, and to obtain from him a more bountiful alms. Scarcely had Sebastian seen him, when he said, "Go and put on the clothes again that you have left at the inn; on your return we will talk about alms." The man, trembling at seeing himself found out, did as he was bid; and on returning to Sebastian, received together with the alms a reproof for having dissembled and employed such an artifice.

But as the Blessed Sebastian knew the interior of hearts, so likewise did he foretell things to come. In 1699, a little before the hereditary prince, whose birth he had predicted, came into the world, he was in the chapel of the royal palace, reciting the rosary of the most Blessed Virgin Mary, with the royal chaplains and others; when suddenly he left the rosary and intoned the "Te Deum." This novelty excited the smiles

of some, it not being known why he thus left off one prayer in the middle and began another; but the smile quickly gave way to general admiration, when towards the end of the recitation of that hymn, it was heard that the prediction in question had received a happy accomplishment. The reader may imagine the wonder of those present on this occasion. They remained mute and confounded, looking at one another; the abbé Alessandro Doria Del Maro, the court almoner, at length breaking silence, embraced Sebastian and said to him, "You, Father Valfré, are a real saint;" but Valfré as usual, turning the thing into joke by some playful expression, left the spot.

In 1706 while Turin was closely besieged by the French, the abbé Antonio De' Bernardi having gone to call on the Blessed Sebastian, full of alarm, said to him, "Father Valfré, our affairs are in a terrible state; I know not what will be the end of it: the fall of the city is plainly at hand. I have no longer a spark of hope." (It seemed indeed that no hope could remain to the inhabitants.) But the servant of God answered, "Distress not yourself, but be cheerful and of good courage: let us go on praying, for to-morrow we shall be delivered; doubt it not, God is for us." This prediction was accordingly realized; he had made it many days before to several persons in his confidence, who were inconsolably grieved at the calamity which to all appearance was certain.

He also foretold the fall of the cupola of our

church during its erection to many persons, who with him were rejoicing in the edifice which the Filippini were raising. He prepared Father Perrardi to be resigned to a most grievous misfortune which was to befall the congregation, and which would affect him the most. Four years after the Blessed Sebastian's death, Perrardi being prefect of the building, in the month of October, 1715, during the night when the vast cupola was almost completed, it suddenly fell to our most serious loss.

Vittoria Fornari Donzel, whom we have already mentioned, attests on oath, that being extremely ill, and ready to expire, having already received extreme unction, she was visited by Valfré, who said these words to her: "Please not yourself with the idea of soon dying; your work in this world is not yet finished." And the same day, although given over by the physicians, she began to improve, and afterwards perfectly recovered.

In October, 1691, Count Lorenzo Boasso, decurion and secretary of Turin, was in so very bad a state of health, that the physicians all said his sickness was without remedy. While then he was every moment expecting to pass into the next life, Valfré presented himself to him, saying, "My dearest Count, I am come to pay you a visit." The sick man answered, "Father, you are come as a good friend to warn me to prepare for death, is it not so? But the physicians have already made me a similar announcement, and I have done what I could to obtain

mercy of God; and I certainly shall obtain it if you will pray for me." Valfré replied, "My reason for coming is quite different; for what I wish to tell you, is, that having to speak to you on matters of interest, I expect you very shortly in my own apartment, that we may there discourse freely and conveniently." And as he said this, giving him his blessing, and making him repeat a very short prayer, the sick man felt himself at the same moment comforted in body and in spirit; and the sickness believed to be incurable, began so far to give way, that in a short time he was able to come into our house, as the Blessed Sebastian had said.

A certain Carlo Raimondi, being in his agony, his wife went to Valfré, and with tears in her eyes said to him, "Your Reverence will never more see your friend my poor husband, for he is at the point of death;" to whom he immediately answered thus, "No, no; praise and thank God, for your husband will get well." And so it was.

In 1693, on occasion of his going to Alba to assist at the solemn translation of the body of the Blessed Margaret of Savoy, the canon Filippo Prandi, begged him to visit the countess his mother, who at seventy years of age had been attacked by a fatal disorder of the chest. Sebastian gladly yielded to the request, and seeing that the canon was beyond measure afflicted, said to him, "Take courage, nay, be consoled, your mother will recover and will live for some years longer."

As he was one day in his room, speaking with a priest, he suddenly rose, saying, "Let us go and call on Prior Zo, for he is ill." Having gone they found him in his agony, quite insensible, and given over for four days by professional men, whence his father, mother, brothers, and the rest of the household, were weeping over him as already dead. Sebastian, after having paused for a moment, considered him attentively, and asked his mother what was given him to keep up his strength. "Nothing," replied the desolate woman, wiping away her tears, "for he can take nothing." Sebastian then said, "It would seem to me that it would be well to try in some way to nourish him." On this the mother, merely to please Valfré, without having a shadow of hope that her son would take anything, applied to his lips a phial containing some restorative, the whole of which was eagerly swallowed by the sick man. Sebastian seeing this went away with his companion, saying to all of the grieving family, "Who knows but that it may please God to let him still live? I am now going to the Oratory, and shall recommend him, and have him recommended by others, to the Lord." On the following night the dying man awoke from his lethargy, and in a short time recovered to the astonishment of all, who said that it was through the prayers of Sebastian alone that he was alive.

Valfré went to see the senator, Francesco Avvenati, who was reduced to the last extremity by a malignant fever, and was receiving the

assistance of the priest. Having entered his chamber he knelt at the foot of the bed and having prayed for a short time came away without saying a word to any one. One of the domestics begged him to see the wife also of the dying man, she too being dangerously ill. On being introduced to her, after having given her his blessing, he said, "Courage! be not cast down; I hope that ere long you and your husband will come into our church to return thanks to St. Philip." At the end of twelve days both were so far restored as to be able to hear mass at the saint's altar, and to nourish themselves with the eucharistic bread.

Still more admirable and miraculous was the following prediction. In the early part of the month of March, 1709, Giovenale Celebrino of the city of Fossano was seized with severe cold accompanied by fever, and by a tumour behind the left ear, which not coming to a head of itself it was necessary for the surgeons to open. A short time after, while this was still under treatment, another tumour formed in his neck, and this independently of the extreme suffering it caused him, had so narrowed the passage of his throat, that no longer being able to swallow, he had to submit to a most painful operation. And as if all these evils were nothing, he had a most acute pain in the upper part of his head, for which neither the physicians of Fossano nor those brought from neighbouring places knew how to find either remedy or alleviation. He was therefore advised, should his disorder abate

a little to go to Turin, with the chance of being able to find among the medical men there one who might understand and heal his infirmity. At the end of September he was able to be moved so as to go to Turin, and our Father Carlo Francesco Vazzuolo, who was his confessor, recommended him very earnestly in a letter to Valfré, who wishing to gratify his friend, failed not to call even twice a day on Celebrino. In each of his visits the Blessed Sebastian related the memorable fact of Coringa's being besieged by the infidels, who raised the siege through terror at the death of their general, caused by a ball from a cannon lighted by a little child; the city thus remaining free when the citizens believed themselves to be utterly lost; adding almost every time after this story, in speaking to the sick man, "Trust in God, for who knows but that when you are least thinking of it, it may please the Lord to aid you." The disease however meanwhile daily increased. The wife of the invalid, overwhelmed with sorrow, at the entreaty of the physician and surgeons begged Sebastian to dispose her husband to make his will, and to set the affairs of his soul in order. He however told the disconsolate woman not to have any doubts, but to recommend herself to God, still repeating the fact of the liberation of Coringa. Giovenale remained in Turin till November, still hoping to be cured; but as he only grew worse, all the medical professors advised him to return home, plainly telling him that they knew not how to find a remedy for

his disorder. At this announcement the sick man losing all courage and hope, set out on his journey back, and in three days reached Fossano, where, having become very much worse, he piously received the sacraments, made his will, and with resignation hourly awaited his death. In the meantime, while he was complaining of the severity of the pain in his head, some one proposed to him to have his hair shaved off, with the chance of this affording him some relief. In performing this operation the surgeon discovered in the very spot in which the greatest pain lay, a little excrescence not before observed, from which on his puncturing it, an immense quantity of corrupt matter issued, by the gradual discharge of which the poor sufferer was relieved. And in fact, on the removal of the bad humour, the wounds were perfectly healed, the tumours vanished, the fever ceased, and the patient speedily recovered; who together with his wife, seeing the verification of the repeated promise, namely, that they should be comforted when they least thought of being so, published what the Blessed Sebastian had repeated every day to them in Turin.

The Marchioness of Pianezza, the physician Ricca, Francesca Maria Olivieri of Sommariva del Bosco, all recovered according to Sebastian's prediction, although they had actually received the most holy Sacraments and were reduced to their agony. He also predicted the unhappy death of two of his nephews, one of whom ended by throwing himself into a well; the other was kill-

ed in 1701. Had these two young men listened to their uncle's advice, they would not have made the end they did.

To some girls resolved to be nuns, he said that they would remain in the world; to some others, on the contrary, who intended to marry, he said that they would change their mind and shut themselves up in a cloister.

In 1622 the Count of Castigliole, Ascanio Asinari, returned from a convent of Capuchins, whither he had gone to be present at the ceremony of one of his daughters taking the religious habit of that order. The servant of God saw him and said to him, "What you have now seen done by your daughter others will ere long see done by yourself." And although this gentleman (who had been for some months a widower) had never understood himself to be called to the religious state, and was apparently thinking of quite other things, he in the following year became a Barefooted Carmelite.

But we should never end if we were to recount all the predictions made by Valfré; wherefore, letting what have been stated suffice, we shall conclude by merely adding the testimony of Victorius Amadeus II., who, speaking of the servant of God already dead, expressed himself thus: "I consider Father Valfré as a real saint, he foresaw all that was to happen to me; and all has been fulfilled according to his words." When the prince made this attestation he possibly did not think that another prediction too of the saint would be verified. Every one knows what he had

to suffer after the abdication of his kingdom in 1730. When he saw himself arrested in Moncalieri, to be conducted into the castle of Rivoli, and thence again transported into Moncalieri, owing to the Marchioness di Spigno, he recollected that so many misfortunes caused by a woman had been announced to him by his beloved Father Valfré, who had many times told him that "a woman would be his ruin." The memory of this prediction punctually verified, encouraged him to suffer the outrages mentioned with a resigned spirit and penitent heart. Giving himself altogether to the exercises of religion, he called to his spiritual aid our Father Perrardi, an intimate friend of Valfré, and under his direction he prepared himself for death, which he met with marked feelings of patience and of compunction.

CHAPTER XXI.

OF OTHER MIRACULOUS CURES PERFORMED DURING LIFE BY THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN.

We have already, in many places, seen how many benefits were conferred and prodigies performed by the Blessed Sebastian, either in providing for the wants of the poor, or in visiting the sick, especially in spiritual matters; we now think it may not be displeasing to the reader if we relate other things done by him, which, if they happened as persons worthy of credit have

stated on oath, are real miracles. But here it seems well, in the first place, to give notice, that if in this chapter we are not so brief as some may desire, it is because we entertain a fixed opinion that by still better knowing how much he could prevail with God while yet amid the mire of earth, our devotion may be kindled or increased towards him who must now be in the highest degree powerful, being above amid the blessed in heaven.

The wife of an apothecary, Michele Lustino, in 1680, in the eighth month of pregnancy, was seized by a fever so malignant, that being given over by the physicians, she received the last sacraments, after which the disease still augmenting and death being believed to be near, a surgeon had been called to be ready to open the body, and save if possible the unborn infant. Meanwhile as Sebastian was making the recommendation of her soul, she felt herself inspired to beg him to place his hand on her head, in the hope that she might experience some relief. Having made this request, she heard him say, "Maria Magherita," that was her name, "it is not my hand that can cure you or give you repose; it is God who alone can do it: take this, kiss it, and cordially recommend yourself to your God." And saying this he took from his breast a little crucifix which he always bore about him. The woman took it with faith and kissed it; and while holding it pressed to her bosom, she fell into a most placid slumber, which lasted about

half an hour, and during which without pain and without even being aware of it she gave birth to a daughter apparently dead. The midwife was nevertheless prompt in applying every test to discover if there were any sign of life; but none being found, the whole family together with the mother, who had awoke, remained full of grief. The thing being mentioned to Valfré who was on his knees in prayer, he said, "Bring the child hither immediately and water also, I wish to baptise it." It was repeated to him that the child was born dead; but Sebastian continuing to express his desire to baptise it, the midwife in obedience to him carried it before him, and although apparently a corpse (for it was not such) it received baptism. The mother having heard of this, turning to Sebastian, who had returned into her room, said to him, "Father, I well know that you chose to pretend to baptise this poor creature although dead, in order to afford me some consolation." On this, Sebastian in order to give her and all the family not a seeming but a true and real consolation, took the infant into his hands, and called it by the name given to it in baptism, saying to it, "Anne Maria, bid your mother good day and then go into Paradise to pray for us." At this command the child opened her eyes, colour rose in her face, she uttered some cries, and was then immediately seen to exhibit the last symptoms of death and to expire. This being done Valfré quitted the spot with precipitation, leaving all exclaiming, "A miracle! a miracle!"

No less miraculous was what happened on the 21st of October, 1684. A fire having broken out in the house of the physician Bolognino, situated in the Contrada Nuova near the monastery of St. Mary Magdalen, Gianlorenzo Tonso, a soldier of the body-guard, moved by charity, joined the people come together to extinguish it. Having entered a room on the first story, he began to throw water where he perceived it to be most needed; when before he was aware that the fire was at work beneath also, the floor suddenly gave way, and the man falling into a room on the ground floor, was so overwhelmed by beams and planks together with the overthrown furniture of the room, that excepting his head and arms he remained buried in the ruin. The Blessed Sebastian, who fortunately happened to pass that way, ran up at once to the spot where the unhappy man had fallen, and having taken him by the hand and put his hat on his head, he said to him, "Up, take courage, for God will help you;" the man, who through the severe shock received in falling had become almost insensible, perfectly recovering from it, found himself, without knowing how, delivered from the fire and the ruins; but so severe had been his fall, that being one mass of bruises, he was unable to stand on his feet, so that his liberator with two other persons accompanied him home, desiring him to go to bed and encouraging him to hope in God. Gianlorenzo having laid himself down, fell asleep, and awaking after a few moments, found himself perfectly well in every re-

spect. On the same day Sebastian coming to visit him, and finding him cured, recommended him to show his gratitude to God for the favour he had received, "as the reward," thus he spoke, "of his lively faith."

Towards the end of 1688 our Brother Andrea Robbioni was seized with a violent pleurisy accompanied by malignant fever. On the seventh day he became so much worse that it was necessary to give him the holy sacraments very speedily, after which he became almost insensible and his agony began. While the recommendation of his soul was being said, Father Valfré came in, who drawing near to the sick person's ear, uttered only these words, "Brother Andrea, Brother Andrea, live for the love of God." At these words Andrea rising from his lethargy, saw that Valfré was blessing him with holy water, and heard him say to him, "Recommend yourself to God; I am now going to celebrate the holy mass for you." The entrance of these words into the sick man's ears and the cure of the disease were one and the same thing; for in a moment, both the pain in his chest, which obstructed his breathing, and the fever disappeared. Meanwhile Father Francesco Maria Saroldo, prefect of the infirmary arrived, and on seeing the brother raised from death to life, asked to know how so wonderful and sudden a change had taken place. Robbioni answered him, saying, "Father Valfré just now came to me and gave me his blessing; he then went away, saying, that he was going to say the holy

mass for me." The father admiring the miracle, said, "That holy man is accustomed to do these things as if in joke: do you, brother, take care not to say how you have been cured; for to do so, as you know, would only displease his profound humility."

In 1691 Enrico Felice Stura was at the point of death; those about him, after having tried all the remedies proposed by the most accredited physicians, and after having had many prayers made without the least success, sent to beg the servant of God to recommend him to St. Philip. Sebastian having obtained an account of the whole illness, said, that he did not think that the invalid was so far gone; and that he himself wished to see him. Proceeding then at once to him, he entered his chamber, and placing himself on his knees at the foot of the bed, he prayed for a short time; then having given him his blessing, he told all the persons who were weeping around, not to give way to sorrow, for that the disease did not appear to him to be mortal; and so he went away. And whereas the physicians had said that in two hours the sick man would be no more, it happened that in two hours after the departure of Sebastian, the sufferer not only found himself out of danger of death, but so free from his malady, that he was able to rise from bed, to leave his house and go to the church.

A priest, Antonio Georgis di Racconiggi, having come on some business to Turin, was seized with a copious and frequent spitting of blood,

which he had almost continually for two days. Having heard that Sebastian had cured various sick persons by his benediction, he wished to make the experiment of a visit to him, feeling confident that should he obtain his blessing, he would be liberated from the indisposition which made him apprehensive for his life. Having come therefore into our church, and having found Sebastian in the confessional, he presented himself to him; and having made his request, it was at once granted. The Blessed Sebastian then went away from the confessional, and followed by Georgis, proceeded to the sacristy; on reaching the latter, the priest was seized with the usual spitting, and calling Valfré, said, "See, Father, the living blood that I eject." He thought at least to receive the consolation of some mild expression; for he no longer entertained that assurance of being cured which he had felt before receiving the blessing, but had relapsed into sadness and fear. It was, however, quite otherwise; for Sebastian assuming a serious air, as if driving him away from himself and from the spot, said, "Go away, go away!" And these words having been uttered, the bleeding ceased, nor did the priest ever again experience any return of it during the remainder of his life.

The eldest son of the Count of Cartos, an infant six months old, had eighteen attacks of illness within the space of twenty-four hours, which circumstance threw all belonging to that most honourable family into the utmost grief and consternation, the child being the heir of

two distinguished families in Piedmont, it being feared that there might be no other offspring from the count's marriage. The first physicians were immediately called in, who prescribed whatever they thought might in any way be of service to the infant. One morning while its mother was holding it in her arms, and it seemed a little more relieved than usual, it was suddenly assailed by another attack more violent than the preceding ones; whence the mother fearing to lose her son, immediately sent to tell her husband, who was at the court, that if he wished once more to see the boy alive, he must hasten home without delay. The count on hearing this not only hastened, but flew, and with his own eyes saw the state of the child, for whose life being much in fear, he asked the physician Ricca if there were still hope; the answer he received was that he must make a sacrifice of his son to God. The countess, who although she saw the serious nature of the illness still entertained hope, was struck as if by a thunderbolt at the physician's words, and becoming half frantic, and not knowing what to do, it occurred to her to send to beg Father Valfré to come immediately to her: and fearing lest through humility he should decline coming, she had the reason of her request concealed from him. Sebastian at once obeyed the call, and entering into the chamber in which the countess was, he was met by her and thus addressed: "Father, you well know how much I have endured, and how many prayers have been made to obtain this

son from God, and now he dies if you pray not for him." Sebastian went to the cradle, at the head of which hung the pictures of St. Philip and of St. Gaetano, and knelt before them. Having remained thus a few moments, he began to recite the Te Deum in an under tone, but so that the countess, who was standing near him, could hear it. Having finished it, he rose, and saying that God could do all things, he went away. As Valfré quitted the chamber, the countess, whose hope had again revived on hearing the Te Deum recited, heard the infant, who had seemed till then as if dead, utter a cry, and running to it, sending at the same time for her husband and the physician, who had withdrawn into some other room, and knew nothing of the Blessed Sebastian's being sent for, they found it entirely freed from its malady, from which it never suffered again during life.

An extremely poor Savoyard, Michelina by name, had been insane for three years; and so violent was her disorder that it transported her into the excesses of screaming as one furious, stripping off and tearing her clothes, falling upon people, biting any one who came before her, breaking earthenware or anything else that came in her way, and even doing worse things than these. This unhappy creature was continually guarded by some charitable women, who kept her always shut up, to prevent her from going out and committing these extravagances in public. She belonged to our parish, and the curate De'

Bernardi went every day to see if she was well attended to, paying the women for their services, and for her maintenance. One day in June, 1709, (it might be about seven o'clock in the evening) the curate going as he was wont to perform his work of charity, found the Savoyard, in addition to her ordinary malady, overpowered by a raging fever, and so debilitated by her struggles throughout the day, that it appeared to him as if little more of life could remain to her. He therefore hastily returned to the congregation to ask Valfré if he would try to hear her confession, that she might receive the viaticum were it possible and extreme unction. Finding him at the porter's lodge, he related to him the woman's state; but Sebastian, pretending not to have understood him, answered, "I know not when this Savoyard is to have done with all these follies of hers; pray go back and tell her to come hither directly to me." On hearing this, De' Bernardi, thinking he had not been understood, replied, "In the state in which she is it is impossible for her to move; it is necessary that your Reverence go to confess her, for she is in danger of death." Valfré rejoined, "Go quickly and tell her that I desire that she come here directly." The curate, unwilling to reply, again set out towards the place, and as he went (he knew not as yet how much Sebastian could prevail with God) he muttered to himself, "I think this good father has a mind to lose his wits to-day: this poor woman has need of extreme unction, and he wants her to come to him: she

will go certainly if I carry her on my shoulders." Meanwhile, having reached the place, and found the woman as he had left her, scarcely able to restrain a smile, he said to her, "Get up, Michelina, Father Valfré wishes you to go to him." At these words the woman said, "And how am I to obey, being as I am?" The answer was, "Up quick, do as you can: Father Valfré wants you, and is waiting for you at the porter's lodge." The woman rose from her bed, dressed herself, put her hair in order to the best of her ability, and set out on the way, following the priest, who, as if he knew not where he was, went along, every now and then turning round to see if the thing were a dream or a reality; and full of amazement he saw the woman coming briskly along without help, without support, as if she had never had anything the matter with her. When they had reached the Piazza, the Blessed Sebastian, who was waiting for them in front of our church, approaching Michelina gave her his blessing and asked her how she did. She having answered that she felt herself perfectly well, Valfré resumed, "Come then, give thanks to God and return home." The woman went home, and, together with the fever, her weakness and frenzy having vanished, she lived long in perfect health.

That a man having like power from God, on being solicited by those devoted to him, should by his intercession obtain for them favours and miracles, is an ordinary and common thing among saints; but that a man should procure

favours and miracles in behalf of one who did not even think of begging him to do so, is something more than ordinary, it is singular, and is a peculiarity of our Blessed Sebastian's.

Laura Maria Raineri had kept her bed for nine months with continual fever: she had a son named Thomas, who had for ten years been afflicted with excruciating pains, and with such convulsions that they had left him deprived of the use of his limbs, and in a state of contraction. Sebastian, moved by the charity ever burning within him, went one day to the abode of these sufferers; and going first into the mother's room, he inquired concerning her health. With a deep sigh she answered, that without a miracle not only could not either she or her son be cured, but could not rise even for a moment from bed, during the short space of life remaining to them; and this she regretted the more, because in the midst of their troubles, she could not lend assistance to her son, nor he to her. Valfré then spoke: "It is not so, it is not so, Madonna Laura; and I therefore wish you to get up directly, as I must send you somewhere." The woman, thinking he was making game of her, answered that it was utterly impossible for her to do what he wished: but Sebastian in a resolute and grave tone, replied, "I command you without any delay to rise this moment from your bed." The sick woman, who held him in veneration, perceiving that he spoke resolutely and seriously, tried to obey him, and she succeeded, but not without a great deal of

trouble in rising and in dressing herself. After this, he turned to the bed in which the son lay, telling him also to get up that he might accompany his mother. The woman did all in her power to remove this idea from Valfré's mind, telling him that he need but look at her afflicted son, to know if it were possible for him to stir; that his pains had so disfigured him, that he no longer looked like a human creature: that—but Sebastian interrupting her, repeated firmly, "I tell you he is to get up, and to come with you, and if he needs support in walking, let him take this stick." Laura seeing that here too it was absolutely necessary to obey, although she could scarcely stand upright, helped her son to rise. Weak and full of pain as they both were, when Sebastian saw them ready to go where he wished, he commanded them to go to the Marchioness di Pianezza's and to the Marquis Villa's. And in fact it came to pass, that by degrees as they went along they felt their pains cease and their weakness diminish, so that they had not gone twenty paces when both mother and son found themselves upright, free from pain, and in health.

I should never have finished would I recount all the miracles of which there is certain proof. The single family of the above-mentioned Raineri would furnish us with enough to form a pretty long chapter. For beside what we have related above of Laura and Thomas, I might say that the husband of the former, Giambatista, twice reduced to the last extremity, first by pleurisy,

and then by malignant fever, was miraculously cured; and with him, his son, Fabrizio, as we know by the sworn testimony of the physician Donzel, who says, that "their recovery was miraculous and above the powers of nature:" I might say that the other son, Francesco Maria, was also rescued by a miracle from a mortal peril in which he found himself while working in a subterraneous place beneath the citadel of Turin; but leaving all these things, I shall only relate the miracle which Sebastian performed on the daughter Camilla. This child, at the tender age of six years, was attacked by a running in the right eye, which, although it at first seemed to be of little importance, so increased, that after seven years of continued malady, and after having suffered the most painful remedies, the child totally lost the sight of the diseased eye. At thirteen years of age then, Camilla deeply grieved at being blind in one eye, was advised by her mother to go and confess to Father Sebastian, and after her confession to recommend herself to him, begging him to interpose his prayers with God for the recovery of her sight. (Laura Maria had often made a similar request to Valfrè, but always in vain.) The innocent child did what her mother said; but when Sebastian heard the petition from her, he said with great seriousness, "Do you think that I can ask this favour for you, knowing for certain that you would make use of it to offend God!" The virtuous girl feeling no resentment at the Blessed Sebastian's words, but full of

humility and faith, immediately answered, "If, O Father, sight would become a cause of sin to me, I conjure you to beg of God not only not to heal my blind eye, but to deprive me of the other also. If God should restore my sight, I earnestly desire that He would give me grace to make a good use of it." This answer extremely pleased Sebastian, (who had wished to prove her,) and resuming his mild aspect, he at once replied, "Blessed child, if it be as you say, and indeed I believe you, go to St. Philip's altar, and recommend yourself to the most holy Virgin Mary; for it is to her that those must recommend themselves who desire similar favours from God." These words augmented the faith of the good child, who leaving the confessional quickly went to the altar just mentioned, and with holy simplicity and confidence told the Virgin Mary that she had been sent by that great servant of God, Father Valfré; whence she hoped that her prayers would be heard. Then after having prayed fervently, she quitted the church as she had entered it, blind in one eye. But on going up the stairs when she reached home, one of her brothers meeting her, saw that a very slender piece of skin was hanging from the eye she had lost. On this being removed with a handkerchief, her sight was at once perfectly restored; nor from that time till that of the process, (she was then a woman of little less than fifty years of age,) did she ever suffer farther disease in her eyes.

Time would fail would I tell all the wonders

that he performed, and through which he had come to be considered by all as a saint; but I will certainly not go farther without first relating at the conclusion of the present chapter, what is found on this subject in the process of the already mentioned Count and president Garagni; whose deposition speaks thus: "I was not twenty years of age when I was one day sent by my father to carry, in the name of the Queen Regent, a certain sum of money for some works of piety to Father Agostino, a Bare-footed Carmelite, and confessor to his majesty, a religious in general esteem for wisdon and virtue. Now wishing to learn his sentiments and to acquire his friendship, knowing that he highly esteemed and, as it were, venerated Father Sebastian Valfré of the congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip, I turned the conversation upon him, saying, that our most pious sovereign distributed many alms by his hands also; and that I often went to call on him, that he admitted me to his confidence, and that I would willingly remain ever by his side, charmed and captivated by his most pleasing manners; I added that I held him to be a man of rare sanctity, having often seen him affectionately caress sinners, and spare no labour, nay nor his life itself, in aiding the poor, whom he loved above all others. And Father Agostino seeing me exceedingly affected in saying these things, said to me, "Be not surprised," (I think it well here to use his own words, that I may not in the least vary from the truth,) "be not surprised, my dear friend;

for know that he has had a good father and master who has taught him to do thus; that he is a true son and disciple of St. Philip," and therefore follows in all things the path and the example of that great saint. As I see that you are well informed of his virtues, I will say no more, except that he is so merciful that in order to give to the poor he has often suffered the most serious inconveniences. For it has happened more than once that during the severest cold, if he has had nothing to give to any one asking alms, he has gone and stripped himself of his under vest and given it away for the love of God; and thus remaining not well covered, he has been attacked by pleurisy and other diseases which have laid him on his bed for many days with risk of life. These things related by the Carmelite religious I listened to with singular diligence and pleasure, remaining half confounded; and as I was wondering at so noble a degree of virtue, he said to me, "Do you wonder, my dear son, at these good deeds? You would speak otherwise did you know a fact (known by few) which I myself witnessed." Weeping with tenderness, for at that period my heart was strongly moved at the recital of virtuous deeds, I begged him to tell it me, and he answered, "Now believe me, my son, that I have seen in him admirable things, exceeding the natural power of man; and since you so much desire to hear such things spoken of, I will relate to you the one that I saw with my own eyes. This saint, for such I hold him to be, came one day

to visit me, and on his going away, seeing him enter our church, I followed and there found him as if in an ecstasy before the altar of the most holy Sacrament; here I too placed myself, but so as not to be seen by him. His prayer being finished, I experienced so great consolation in merely seeing him, that I followed him out of the door, and I there saw how wonderful God is in His saints. Upon the last step a poor man was accustomed to stand, who, being lame from his mother's womb, was carried like the stock of a tree, and placed there every day; and not possessing the means of sustaining life, he asked aid of those passing by. While therefore he was waiting for some one to enter the church, Father Valfré came out of it. The man according to his custom stretched out his hands to him, asking charity; but Father Sebastian, after having stopped a little to look at him, excused himself, saying, that he had nothing to give him. The poor man repeated his request, but obtained nothing. The holy Filippino had already passed on, and was about to go forth through the piazza, when he suddenly turned back saying to the cripple, 'Hearken, brother; I have not, as I have told you, any money about me, nor anything else to give thee; but tell me, art thou willing to come with me to the door of my congregation? There, I could give thee an alms.' The man answering that he would gladly do so were it possible, Valfré (first casting a glance around and seeing no one) said to him, 'Well then, have

faith, my brother, get up and come along. Give me thy hand;' and having taken the latter in his own, he helped him, drawing him up. I must confess, my dearest son, that on seeing these things I was agitated by an unusual interior commotion, and began to tremble from head to foot. And without staying to relate minutely every particular of this fact, the mere thought of which even now renews my agitation and tremor, I tell you that in Turin, at the door of the church of St. Theresa, was renewed before my own eyes the miracle performed by St. Peter in Jerusalem, at the temple gate named 'Beautiful.' The lame man, as he himself told me when I declared to him all that I had seen, felt while Valfré was helping him to rise a new and unaccustomed vigour infuse itself into the soles of his feet, and letting go Sebastian's hand he could move freely along and follow his liberator to the congregation, holding his peace the whole way as one stupified, confounded, and beside himself at so great a wonder. But as soon as he had placed his foot within the door of the Oratory, as if awakened from a profound sleep, he took the saint's hand, and in joy and gratitude kissed it a thousand times; and in doing this he wept so tenderly as to excite tears from the house-porter (although he knew nothing of the miracle) and from Sebastian himself; but while the poor man was beginning to return thanks aloud to God and to bless him for so great a favour, Father Valfré imposing silence on him strictly prohibited him from publishing what had hap-

pened; and the day after he made him speedily depart for another city in Piedmont, where at this time, being stout and healthy, he gains his livelihood as a porter.

"These things," thus Garagni concludes, "Father Agostino related to me, and I now most willingly make a sworn deposition of them in the same words used by me in writing so soon as I had left him, in order that it may be known that not only the common people and ignorant women, but likewise men of worth, knowledge, and sense, held it as certain that Father Sebastian Valfré while living performed miracles at his pleasure."

CHAPTER XXII.

OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN'S FORESIGHT OF THE DAY AND YEAR OF HIS DEATH.

To him to whom it had been granted by God to foresee what concerned others, it was also granted to foresee the day and year in which his blessed soul, set free from the bonds of the body, should go to enjoy the glory prepared for it in heaven. This however he did not tell plainly to all, because (as we have seen) the virtue of humility being extremely dear to him, he made it his study to keep the gifts of God concealed, in order that he might not be known either to possess the prophetic spirit, or to re-

ceive divine revelations. A priest, an intimate friend of his, condoling with him on the death of Father Ormea, as of a person who did much good in Turin, and who was a man of knowledge, counsel, and piety, Sebastian also manifesting great regret, said to him as he left him, "My dear friend, we should ever be prepared, not knowing when God may please to call us to Himself, 'Hodie mihi, cras tibi:' this year (it was 1709) it was Father Ormea's turn, the next it will be Valfré's."

Two or three months before his death, he sent to his relations at Verduno some writings which he had by him, regarding the interests of his family; as also he sent to the Countess Louisa Christina Trivie other writings belonging to her. To give their due weight to these things it must be mentioned, that in the many sicknesses he had sustained, although some were considered by the physicians to be dangerous and even mortal, he had never thought of doing this. A manifest sign that he was then secure of not dying.

Although it was not his usual time for them, he made the spiritual exercises with extraordinary recollection; he burned some papers which he did not wish should fall into other hands; he restored to the librarian some books belonging to the community, which he kept in his chamber, saying, "We are drawing near to death; we must first put all things in order."

In December, the last month of his life, Garresio leaving Turin for a short time, on going

to take leave of Sebastian, received from him such extraordinary tokens of friendship that he felt mortified by them. Sebastian on seeing him rose, warmly embraced him, and for some time held his head on the bosom of Garresio, a thing he had never done before. When the latter took his leave, he would accompany him to the door of the passage; again he embraced him with affection, and said, with great difficulty retaining his tears, (Sebastian very much loved this good priest,) "Till we meet again in Paradise."

Finally, January being come, Valfré went to call on his most intimate friends, as if to bid them a last adieu; and when he did not find them at home, he particularly enjoined the servants not to forget to tell their masters, that he had been and that he affectionately saluted them. To those whom he found at home he made such demonstrations of urbanity and courtesy that they all remained in astonishment, not understanding the cause of the novelty.

To Father Gabbrielle Cervino, his confidential friend, he said, "In a few days you will see something which will cause you some concern." The curate, De' Bernardi, who was wishing to visit his native place, he told to defer his departure for eight days, because he desired that he should see with his own eyes what would happen. The reader understands that all the doings and sayings of Sebastian hitherto related had no other reference than to his death, nor were more manifest signs wanting.

There was a good and devout woman, much

given to all matters of piety and of religion, named Margherita Fea, who was a penitent of Sebastian. Now, two days before he took to his bed, this person going to confession, when about to leave the confessional, he let her know that he should not confess her any more, because within a week he should perhaps be dead. At hearing which the woman was as if struck by a thunderbolt. "And what shall I do without you," said she, "for in losing you I lose both my spiritual father, and him also who helps me in the necessities of life?" And he comforting her, answered that she had acquired the art of painting, that she lived in the holy fear of God, and kept up devotion to the most holy Virgin Mary, and that nothing would ever be wanting to her.

The brother Bernardo Moggino suffered from scruples of conscience, and had many times begged Father Valfré, his confessor, to tell him (in case he had to survive him) how he should proceed when he no longer had his direction, and to which of the fathers he should go to confession. The servant of God had always answered, that he must be easy about that, for that before his death he would give him advice on the subject, and would suggest to him a suitable confessor. Now Brother Bernardo going into his room, while with the exception of old age he was enjoying perfect health, so that no sign of death nor even of sickness was apparent, had scarcely presented himself when Sebastian said to him, "It is now time that I tell you how to

proceed when I shall no longer be in the world." Three days after this Sebastian fell sick.

But with still greater precision did he give brother Francesco Calvetti to understand that he knew the day of his death. This brother was accustomed every year, at his own expense, to give to the whole community a pittance for the feast of St. Francis of Sales, whose name he bore. He came therefore about the middle of January to Valfré, who was superior, to ask permission to do so; and this was at once given; but Sebastian having considered that that year the feast would fall on a Wednesday, told him that he should have preferred his transferring the thing to the day after. But after a few moments' silence, looking fixedly on the ground, and full of thought, he turned to Calvetti, saying, "It is better to return to the first plan: celebrate the feast in the refectory on the Wednesday, for on the Thursday I shall have to celebrate it in the church." The brother left him without being able to understand the meaning of these words; the signification of which he well understood when Sebastian being dead was on that day carried into the church, where a solemn mass being chanted for his soul, a vast multitude of persons assembled, as we shall see in the following chapter.

On the 23rd of January he made his will, and on the 25th, the first day of his illness, the porter going to look for him in the sacristy, while he was making his thanksgiving, told him he must please to come to the door to comfort a poor

woman who was a stranger, and who showed a great desire to speak with him. Sebastian answered that he was not able to do so, feeling himself very ill, and that he must do what was wanted for him, hear the woman, that is, and report to him what she desired. But as the porter was moving off to do as he had been charged, Sebastian called him back, saying, "Just help me, and we will go this once;" and leaning on the man's arm, he went to do that last office of charity.

Another certain argument for the persuasion that the hour of his death had been with precision divinely revealed to him, is this. Both the physicians who attended him, seeing him on the evening of the 28th much oppressed, having a violent fever and a grievous restlessness, thinking that he would certainly depart at midnight, said that Extreme Unction should be administered; and they wondered how it was that the servant of God, who had so eagerly sought the other sacraments, said not a word of this. The most ancient of the fathers therefore approaching him, asked him if he were then willing to receive Extreme Unction. "As you will," he replied, "although even to-morrow it will be done in time." And the infirmarian saying that it should then be deferred; he immediately answered, "No, no; let them give it me now." All were astonished at hearing him say with so much confidence, that the day after he should be still alive, while the physicians were giving him three or four hours more of life, and not beyond that;

but still more were they amazed when they saw him on the following day appear rather better. He repeated the same thing on the same evening, about an hour after when the report of his approaching death being spread abroad, the princess Maria Caterina, the widow of the most serene prince, Emanuele Filiberto di Carignano, sent a gentleman for some papers and other things which she had entrusted to the care of Sebastian, who on hearing the request of the princess, notified where everything lay, adding that he had already thought of making a like restitution on the following day.

CHAPTER XXIII.

OF THE LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH OF THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN, AND OF CERTAIN APPARITIONS OF HIM AFTERWARDS.

Overcome by age and consumed by labours the Blessed Sebastian was about to make that last passage so much feared by him who has followed the maxims of the world, and so much desired by him who has spent his whole life in the service of his neighbour and for the greater glory of God. Although an old man of eighty, so long as he could stand on his feet he desired to continue his labour in the mystical vineyard of the Lord. On the 24th of January, 1710, he preached to the nuns of S. Croce, then pro-

ceeding to the senatorial prisons he applied himself to the consolation of a malefactor executed on the following day; passing thence to the house of the "Holy Office," having to speak with one of the religious there, he returned with quickened step in order to be present at the Oratory, which was then held in a damp and cold place. It was Friday, on which day our people are accustomed to use the discipline, whence Sebastian, although heated by the walk, wishing to show himself entirely observant to the last, uncovering his shoulders, took a fatal cold. On the succeeding night he was much troubled by a cough, but he nevertheless would not abstain from celebrating the holy mass in the morning; and having found other priests in the sacristy, he had them all vested before himself, though he was aware that his indisposition was augmenting. Having made his thanksgiving, feeling his strength fail, supported by a brother he went to the door to listen to a woman who had asked for him; thence going up into his chamber, he was obliged at once to take to his bed. It appeared to the physicians at first that the illness was of a serious nature, but the day after a most violent fever having broken out they altogether despaired of his recovery.

The sick man's first thought was that of directing his attendants not to let those who might come to visit him enter his room, but to thank them all in his name for their courtesy, and beg them to remember him in their prayers. He then with a few words disengaged himself

from those more in his confidence, to whom he could not deny entrance, suggesting some pious sentiment to all of them. This he did from unwillingness to be separated from his intimate union with God, which he manifested by ardent and continued ejaculations. Often during the day he had read to him either some point of meditation or other spiritual matter, giving from time to time kisses of affection to his beloved crucified Lord, keeping the crucifix on his breast. He was entirely obedient to all that the physicians prescribed, and received whatever the infirmarian gave him, although with certainty foreseeing the end of his life; and to a proposal that he should take any medicine or a little of something restorative, he usually answered, "In God's name let me take anything," or "Let me do as you please."

No sooner was it reported throughout Turin that he was seriously ill, than there was universal and extraordinary lamentation, together with a common desire to be informed of every more minute particular of his sickness. The greatest personages, priests, cavaliers, and gentlemen, who venerated him as a saint; merchants, artists, but more than all others, the poor, who recognised him as a father, bitterly bewailed his approaching death. Public prayers were made for him in our own church, by the Cistercian monks, in the greater part of the convents, by all the consecrated virgins in the monasteries, and in all the hospitals of charity; our sovereign too himself, in order to implore the intercession of the

most blessed Virgin Mary for his preservation, went to confess and communicate at the church of Madonna della Consolata. One of the worthy persons who frequently visited the Blessed Sebastian, was the abbé Ignazio Caroccio, rector of the metropolitan church, whom we have already mentioned above. He animated him to confide in the divine goodness, and exhorted him to be resigned to the will of God, in case the disease were incurable; but the good Father, who had never had any other desire than to arrive at his last end, had no difficulty in opening his mind to him who was his most confidential friend, saying to him, "Know, my friend, that never having had any attachment to the world, I experience no regret at quitting it." In truth his spirit was in perfect tranquillity, and totally free from those anxieties which had for a time so much oppressed him. It is the admirable providence of God, that those just and holy men, who during life have had a salutary fear of death, are not afraid of it when it is near; on the contrary, he who has been accustomed to drive away the thought of it, as of a sad and melancholy thing, so that he may live according to his fancy, trembles with fear, is horrified and in despair, when he finds himself at that awful moment.

Within the few days that the illness lasted, Victorius Amadeus II. himself went twice to visit Sebastian, nor would ever enter his chamber without having heard if he would like to receive him. He made him the first visit on

the evening of the 28th of January; on approaching him, he embraced and kissed him, saying, "Good evening, my dear Father; and laying aside the majesty of the sovereign, the servant of God having need to expectorate, he himself, with his own hands, held the spittoon to him, wiped his lips with a handkerchief, and adjusted his pillow; and when the Brother Giammichele manifested a respectful resistance, and an unwillingness to permit that so great a personage should abase himself to so mean an office, the king persisted, answering familiarly, "I too at times can act as infirmarian;" and having occupied himself a short time in speaking secretly with Sebastian, he took leave of him, saying, "Adieu, my dear Father, remember me." The next evening at the same hour he returned, and after having affectionately saluted the sick man, and having staid a few moments alone with him, on rising to go away he asked for his hand, saying that he wished to feel his pulse. Valfré put forth his hand, and that most religious prince, pretending to watch the movements of the pulse, bent forward and reverently kissed the hand, saying with much emotion, "Father Valfré, I recommend myself and all my family to your prayers." The holy old man full of confusion at these marks of honour and reverence, unable to prevent them, showed by his gestures with what repugnance he received them; and fixing his eyes on his sovereign, said, "I have throughout my life ever prayed for your Royal Highness, and for your family; and I now promise you

that I will continue to do the same after death also." Then with the voice, not of a dying man, but of one in health, he went on: "May your Highness compassionate and seek to relieve the miseries of your subjects, so long oppressed by long wars; may you be mindful to be ever in concord and unity with the Supreme Pontiff, the Vicar of Jesus Christ, if you wish that God may prosper yourself, your royal family, and your state." To which the king answered, "Yes, father, this I will do." Then with tears in his eyes which he could no longer restrain, having taken leave, he went into the church to receive the benediction of the Most Holy Sacrament, as he had done the day before.

On the fourth day of his illness, having more than once made his confession, Valfré received the most holy viaticum with sentiments of fervour and of singular piety. On this occasion in accompanying the Sacrament the whole body of the fathers had entered his chamber; he then, even in this extremity, desiring to make an act of rare humility, said, "I ask pardon of God for my grievous sins; and of you, my worthy fathers, I ask pardon for the little edification which I have given you; I earnestly beg you to pray for me." On the following evening before receiving Extreme Unction, he asked to be blessed with St. Philip's rosary, he also wished that this benediction should be preceded by the litanies of the most Holy Virgin Mary and other prayers, to all which he responded in a way that drew tears from the eyes of as many as were present, ending in

that ejaculation which was most often on his lips, "God be praised." Extreme Unction was then given to him; during the time he ceased not to recite devout prayers, without ever showing the least agitation, which however was manifested in the highest degree by F. Giuseppe Domenico Canonici, who had to administer it to him; and in an equal degree by all the other fathers and brothers assembled there.

This function being ended, all lamenting and weeping with great tenderness embraced him with warm affection. And Sebastian as if leaving his prison to return home, dying in the utmost tranquillity and with lively trust, admonished all to grow in fervour and charity towards their neighbour, and recommended to them above all to be jealous in maintaining the good name of the congregation. Having finished speaking, Canonici still weeping said to him, "Father Superior, we all cordially beg your pardon for the trouble which we have often given you;" but unable to go on, stifled by his sobs, he remained silent. When he had recovered himself, he continued, "We now wish to beg one favour of you, that is, your benediction." At this request the holy old man answered, "Willingly, as superior I will give it you;" and having first cast a look of love and tenderness upon all, raising his hand a little, (his weakness permitted no more,) and making over them the sign of the holy cross, with a voice feeble and interrupted by exhaustion, he said, "Benedictio Dei Omnipotentis descendat super vos et super ex-

ercitia vestra. In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen."

It was thought by the physicians and others that he would that night pass to eternal rest, but instead of this, on the following morning, the feast of St. Francis of Sales, his particular advocate, against the common expectation, not only (as he had predicted) was he found living, but also with some amendment; and he therefore desired to feed again on the Bread of Angels. It was the duty of the house-porter, at Sebastian's expense, to give alms in money to the poor who might come to ask it: when he had dispensed any sum, he mentioned it to him, and was at once reimbursed. The man now found himself creditor for two livres, but seeing that the sick man was much oppressed, he dared not say a word to him about it. Having gone, however, on this very day to visit him, scarcely had Valfré seen him among the others, when he called him to him, made him take his purse, and take out of it half a French crown, which, at that time, was worth two livres and a few sous, saying, "Take this money which I owe you, it is a trifle more, give it to the poor." The porter was amazed, not only at seeing that the Blessed Sebastian, even thus reduced, thought of everything, but that he even precisely knew the amount of what he owed: a thing which the porter had not made known to any one. For the rest, the sick man passed the whole of that day in extraordinary recollection, preparing himself by frequent acts of sorrow and of love for the

attainment of the glory to which God would call him on the following day. In the night the disease increased extremely, so that the humour which heavily oppressed his chest, seemed ready to suffocate him; and such was the spasm produced, that he was once heard to say, "I am now quite spent." Half an hour before he expired, Father Emanuel asked him if he desired the sacramental absolution; he immediately bowed his head, saying that he did desire it: this having been given he entered into glory, which was without agitation, without convulsion, without any sign of inquietude or of fear; but with great tranquillity of spirit and placidity of countenance he passed from this life, committing his soul to heaven at eight o'clock in the morning of the 30th of January, 1710, being then at the age of eighty years, ten months, and twenty-one days.

King Victorius, on hearing of his death, manifesting deep grief, as if a most heavy calamity had befallen the state, said, "I have lost a great friend, the congregation a great support, and the poor a great protector and a father." The whole court showed great signs of grief, as did all the citizens likewise. The corpse being removed a few hours after into the church, the whole city, so to speak, drew thither, every one crying aloud, "A great saint is dead!" The fathers, seeing that the throng continually increased, in order to prevent any disorder, ever wont to arise in great crowds, thought of placing themselves by turns to guard the bier, and even of calling to their

aid a good number of soldiers. But it was all to no purpose; for as the event was communicated from one to another throughout Turin, the concourse of people swelled, nor could it be kept back; all wanted to see their friend, their father, their benefactor, and to draw near to him, one to kiss his hands, another his feet; some to have chaplets and medals touched by him, others to cut off some portion of his vestment or hair; nor were those wanting who even carried off his beretta, which had to be replaced several times. Having laboured towards three o'clock in the morning to send the people away, the fathers, to avoid being so much disturbed, proposed to perform their functions, say the masses, and administer the sacraments in the Oratory, on the ensuing day, and, keeping the doors of the church closed, to admit only the more respectable class of persons. So it was determined; but the thing turned out quite otherwise. For his great virtue, accompanied by the wonders of so many miraculous cures which were noised abroad, had so excited the people, that for two hours before the dawn of day, the whole city, I might say, had assembled on the Piazza, and knocking loudly at the door, cried out to have it opened to them that they might "adore," as they said, "the saint," so that it was necessary even at that hour to throw open all the doors of the church, which was in a moment filled with people; and as the numbers did not diminish, even after mid-day, it was thought fit, in order to put an end to the crowd, to proceed to the interment of the blessed

corpse. Suitable orders were given; but when the execution of them was attempted, the assembled multitude, regarding neither the fathers nor the armed force, rose in opposition to it. Things were at this point when the vicar-general, Pietro Antonio Trabucco, arrived, saying that it was the order of the archbishop that the satisfaction in question should be permitted, the servant of God being left exposed to view till late in the evening. He said, moreover, that the extraordinary demonstrations of the whole city, and the manifest virtues of Valfré, required that before his interment an official examination of his body should take place, with a view to the future dispositions of Providence in his regard, and that to this end, he should come towards night with the secretary of the Archiepiscopal Court. This was accordingly done; the doors, as on the preceding day, being closed by force, the corpse was found not in the least disfigured, but just as was the body during life, the countenance amiable, and the hands soft and flexible, which were kissed with great tenderness and reverence both by the vicar and the rest; the vicar had the act of sealing performed by the chancellor Giovanni Grosso in the presence of respectable witnesses. The corpse was laid in an oaken coffin, within which was also placed a plate of lead, on which was written his name and age, as also the day of his death and that of his interment; after which the coffin was closed and sealed in several places with the archiepiscopal seal; to defend it from the damp

it was placed within another coffin also of oak, which was carried into the subterranean chamber destined for the common sepulchre of the Fathers of the congregation.

Having found in the depositions made in the process some remarkable visions which are related of him, it seems to me suitable and just to mention a few of them; because I think that through them God was willing even more to manifest Sebastian's sanctity, and also to make known the goodness of those who were made worthy of them.

On the day on which he passed from this life, the priest, Gianbatista Oberto, confessor to the nuns of St. Clara in Carignano, celebrating the holy mass, having come to the offertory, being in an ecstacy, saw in vision the servant of God, who, it seemed to him, after a short agony, gave back his soul to God. This ecstacy lasted some time. The nuns seeing that the mass was prolonged, feared that some sickness might have attacked him; no sooner therefore was the sacrifice finished, than they desired to know how he was, and what had been the cause of his being so long. He opening his heart mentioned the "distraction" (so he termed it) which he had had; or, in other words, he made known how much God had made him see. Not attaching great importance to what had happened, but still in some doubt, he determined to go at once to Turin, and know Valfré's state; and having dismounted at our house, he heard that he had died about eight o'clock, that is,

at the very hour in which he had been obliged to suspend the divine Sacrifice, in order to be present at his blessed passage.

It was also through supernatural light that Carlo Antonio Vacchetta, a priest of the Turin mission, a man of singular virtue, and who died in the fame of sanctity, knew of the death of the Blessed Sebastian. He was in the school giving the lecture on morals, when suddenly breaking off he said, "Let us repeat three Paternosters and three Ave Marias for Father Valfré, who is now in agony;" and after a few moments he said, "Blessed man! He has flown away to Paradise." In fact, a short time afterwards, the news of Valfré's death arrived.

About four and twenty hours had passed from the moment of his death, and at Verduno nothing was as yet known of it, when Giovanni Valfré, nephew of the Blessed Sebastian on the brother's side, awaking from a mortal lethargy, said to his wife, "Our good uncle is dead, and you do not tell me." But she, answering that she did not know it, asked him how he could say this. He replied, "Yesterday he came to vist me, and after having staid a little here, I saw him all resplendent rise above the clouds." The woman and the rest of the family took this to be the delirium of a sick person; but on the arrival of the mournful intelligence they found that he had died the very day before.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OF THE CREDIT AND REPUTE FOR SANCTITY WHICH THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN POSSESSED BOTH IN LIFE AND IN DEATH.

Much as the most humble servant of God Sebastian Valfré studied to avoid any display of his singular virtues, great as was his diligence in concealing the very sublime gifts with which the Lord favoured him, nevertheless his holy works, his apostolical labours, and the benefits which through his prayers the devout obtained from God, could not remain unknown; on the contrary, they were so spread abroad as to be matter of admiration, not only in Turin, but (as we have said elsewhere) both in the state and in other countries; he was everywhere reputed as the example of priests, the apostle of Piedmont, and another St. Philip. This was the opinion entertained of him both by the common people and by the most illustrious persons of that period.

The Father Maurizio Riccardi having gone to Rome for the holy year 1700, and having presented himself to kiss the foot of Innocent XII., on behalf of Father Valfré, the Pontiff manifested great satisfaction in receiving the act in question, and said many things in praise of Valfré. The same sentiments were exhibited by Clement XI. also, to the arch-priest of Castino, Gianlorenzo Uberti: "When the good Cardinal

Colloredo was living (so spoke the Pope) if Father Valfré had need of us, he employed him as a medium; but since the death of the said cardinal, we have had no further request from him. Say now in our name, to that virtuous and indefatigable priest, that when he wants anything, he must write immediately to us, as we wish to satisfy him in all things, knowing what he does for the good of the Holy Church; and carry to him our benediction."

Whether he were esteemed by the sacred College of Cardinals, was clearly seen when the Congregation of the Propaganda having to send a vicar apostolic into England, a Gherardo Saltmart was elected so soon as it was understood that he had a letter of recommendation from Father Valfré; to whom in the name of the congregation Cardinal Caprara thus wrote: "When the cardinals heard that your Reverence proposed Signor D. Saltmart, without seeking further requisites, they chose that he should be elected in preference to every one else; so that although I myself had some one to propose, I was obliged to be silent. For your sake, most venerated Father Sebastian, Colloredo's proposal was at once accepted, and was fully approved by his holiness when the account of it was given to him."

Giambatista Basso, bishop of Anagni, on the 3rd of December, 1720, gave this testimony: "During the time that I was staying in Turin I had the consolation of several times paying my respects to Father Sebastian Valfré, whose prais-

es on account of the great virtues which adorned him, I had in so many places heard. The rectors of the whole state to which he belonged conferred with him on the spiritual interests of their parishes, and obtained from him suitable and holy counsels for themselves and for the benefit of the souls entrusted to them. The bishops, archbishops, and personages of the first rank had recourse to him, that they might have good direction in all their affairs. But passing over all that he did for the good of his neighbour, it shall suffice to make known that such and so many were his labours, that he might with full justice be called, as indeed he was called by many, the Apostle of Piedmont."

Tommaso Maria Morelli, who was a priest of the Oratory at Rome, and afterwards archbishop of Urbino, thus wrote of him on the 8th of May, 1722: "I recollect having very often observed Father Valfré in the churches remaining so immoveable in the contemplation of heavenly things, that he seemed a seraph." And in another place, "Oh, how were his words, how were his letters inflamed with divine love! What zeal sparkled in his eyes! What would he not have done to repair an offence against God! And when it was not possible for him to prevent it, what oppression of heart, what agitation of mind did he not experience! His ordinary indispositions proceeded from the mortal bitterness which he endured on seeing his God outraged; so that his life might be well called a continual holocaust of charity, being entirely and at all

times employed in God and through God for the good of his neighbour." And finally in another place also: "One could not hear him preach without being moved to compunction; and although he spoke not with sublimity of style but with ingenuous simplicity, his words were living and efficacious, and more penetrating than a two-edged blade. Never did he shut up his bowels to the necessities of his neighbour; the poor recognized him as a father, the afflicted as a consoling angel; he made himself the servant of all in order to gain all, nor could anything whatever in the least cool his zeal. Not only throughout Piedmont, but in Rome and other cities of Italy, in which I have been, it was generally said that he had the spirit of prophesy, the gift of working miracles," &c., &c.

Charles Emanuel II. had so much esteem for Sebastian, that in June, 1675, being dangerously ill, he sent for him, and commanded him not to leave his bedside till he had expired.

In regard to Victorius Amadeus I add nothing to what I have already said, except that he referred himself to him even in the civil government of his state, having no difficulty in changing his opinion when he found it to be in opposition to Sebastian's. He had intended to put a certain tax on oil of olives: Valfré on hearing this immediately hastened to him, and having with much zeal shown him that the thing would be an injury to the churches and the mendicant orders, the sovereign entirely laid aside the idea, never again speaking of it. Of this we are

certified by l' Aicardi, president of Virla. He ever cherished his memory, and animated the fathers to undertake the cause of his beatification, concerning which, when entered upon, he every day made inquiries, desiring to be punctually informed of everything, and endeavouring to promote the speedy termination of the process. His consort too, when the Blessed Sebastian went to visit her, was seen to rise, go to meet him with marks of veneration, and even to raise for him the tapestry hung before the door. Should there be any one to whom these demonstrations of the esteem and respect of like personages for our Blessed Sebastian seem not enough, the many others already mentioned in various passages above, may be added; those, that is to say, which were rendered him by the royal princesses, Maria Adelaide, and Maria Louisa, who until death regarded him as their guardian angel; and those of the Cardinal Colloredo, of the archbishop of Turin, and of the apostolic nuncios; all which I intend to pass over, to avoid repeating what in so many chapters we have already seen in the course of this Life.

This exalted reputation in which the Blessed Sebastian stood with the great, he enjoyed (and perhaps in a still higher degree) with the lower class at Rome, Bologna, Venice, Florence, Genoa, and Milan, to say nothing of those at home; nay, the Marquis Gaspero Maria Morozzo, ambassador to the court of Spain, and the Count Carlo Emanuel Balbis di Vernon, ambassador to the court of France, attest that they had heard

Valfré spoken of with veneration as a saint in Madrid and in Paris.

And indeed the people had recourse to him as to a saint; they visited his sepulchre, carried his picture about them, and venerated his relics. "I have been," thus speaks the above-cited Brother Calvetti, as I extract from the process, "I have many times been to visit the tomb of the servant of God, Father Sebastian Valfré, sometimes alone and sometimes accompanied by priests and by seculars, with the view of recommending myself to him, as I saw that others did, kneeling before his remains. I recollect having been there with some bishop also, and once with a young man whose name I do not now remember. He told me that he had come thither to visit Valfré's tomb, in order to fulfil a vow he had made while a slave in the hands of the Turks; on which occasion he had recommended himself to him with the solemn promise of going to visit him should he be freed from slavery; which liberation, he said, had been accomplished miraculously, and that he acknowledged it to have been obtained by the intercession of the servant of God.

The rector Gianbatisti Buscati too makes this deposition: "I have been down to visit the grave of the servant of God, Sebastian Valfré, in order to recommend myself to him, and I have many times found various persons below (although the spot is extremely inconvenient) who were doing the same thing. Among others I remember that the Marquis of Priè, after having

made his prayers there, desired the portrait of Sebastian, which with great sentiments of devotion he kissed in my presence. Up to the year 1719, during which period I have been in the congregation, I have seen persons illustrious through birth, dignity, and learning go into the subterranean part of the church to pray at the tomb of the said Valfré."

Finally, the following is the testimony of another respectable person: "The fame of this servant of God's sanctity not only maintained itself after his death during the time that the corpse was exposed in the public church, but has maintained itself even up to the present moment, as if it were but a few days instead of many years since he died. Every one seeks some memorial of him, either his picture engraved or painted, or relics; all desire his beatification and canonization. Persons of consideration, through nobility, dignity, virtue, or letters, entertain the same esteem for him. I have spoken of Father Sebastian with nearly all the bishops of Piedmont and Savoy, and each one has highly eulogized him, and manifested veneration for him. But what do I say! I have heard the virtue and sanctity of this servant of God spoken of in Milan, in Bologna, and in other cities; and what is worthy of remark is, that in places so different, I have never heard a word to the contrary."

By reason of this general credit for sanctity in which Sebastian stood both during life and after death, a credit supported by his luminous

virtues, increased by his supernatural gifts, constantly and universally maintained by the just judgment of wise men, never weakened either by contrary opinion or by the lapse of time, the fathers finally determined to undertake the cause of his beatification. And here it must he observed, that in a matter so serious and important the Filippini did not act from their own impulse, but were solicited to do so by the repeated instances of persons of authority and by Victorius Amadeus himself; neither did they ever show themselves precipitate in their proceedings, being on the contrary accused of extreme tardiness and even of negligence, ten years having elapsed since his death without their having yet made one step towards the accomplishment of that, which as it was to the glory of God and the praise of Valfré, so it redounded also to the honour of the whole congregation.

CHAPTER XXV.

OF THE MIRACLES WHICH THE BLESSED SEBASTIAN DID AFTER DEATH.

To prove how much while still living the Blessed Sebastian was able to prevail with God, we have in two chapters related several favours received through his intercession by those devoted to him; in order to make still better known his sanctity and potency, we must now relate some of those numerous miracles which it pleased God

to work after his death, beginning with the two recognized as such by the holy Congregation of Rites.

Sister Maria Felice Panuzia of the monastery of St. Pelagia at Turin, at the end of November 1709, was struck with paralysis, and remained without the use of her left side, and so weakened on the right, that she could not move without help. Being an old woman seventy years of age, and it being winter, there was little hope of her recovery. She had lain in this state for nearly two months, when it being told her that Father Valfré was dying, she forgot herself, praying to God that He would deign to restore health to him who was spending his whole life in the service of his neighbour. But after this hearing of his death, and being confident that his soul had passed into life eternal, she fervently recommended herself to him, saying, "Father Valfré, you were ever a holy man, and it being therefore certain that you are now in Paradise, you can, if you will, help me, obtaining for me from God either health or some degree of restoration. It is not because I am sorry to suffer that I make this request, this is not the case; but it is because I am sorry to be troublesome to these my good sisters, many of whom, in order to assist me, are obliged to omit the acts prescribed by our Institute." On the 31st of January, a day on which possibly with more fervour than on the day before, the sick woman repeated her prayer, her disease increased, not permitting her for twenty-four hours to take the least repose. On

the 1st of February, at dawn of day, she felt that her left hand was gradually regaining strength, then her leg, and lastly her whole side; but what was most miraculous was, that extremely feeble as she must have been, both from age, and from having been so long confined to her bed, together with the power of moving, she felt so great a return of strength that she was immediately able to rise conveniently without any one's help, and to walk freely through the monastery without any symptom of paralysis remaining.

Domenica Lucia Fassi of Villafranca in Piedmont, in the year 1734, at sixteen years of age, was attacked by a violent fever accompanied by convulsions, which reduced her to the last extremity. But in a few days the violence of the attack diminishing, the disease changed into a slow continual fever, which lasted from May till September, in which month the malady again returned as at the beginning; and such were the convulsions in the excess of fever as to make her keep her fingers clenched so as not to be able to be opened by any means; she was also oppressed by an asthma, and the muscles of her lower jaw were so contracted that she could not even open her mouth. But what most alarmed her medical attendants was her having lost all sensibility in her legs; to which was added a total inability to take rest. In spite of all the powerful remedies which were employed, the invalid continued growing worse, and one day, having even become insensible, it seemed that she was in her agony, and she was

laid out as dead by her friends. At this time an uncle of hers, having about him a picture of the Blessed Sebastian, to whom he was extremely devout, placed it on her bosom, telling her to recommend herself to him, that he might at least obtain for her the grace of being able to receive the holy viaticum. The sick girl then showed that she heard the pious exhortation, and recommending herself to the blessed man, it seemed to her that she heard him answer, "Doubt not, you will communicate." In fact, shortly after, being perfectly come to herself, she was able to feed on the Bread of Angels. The good Domenica, finding herself heard in this, rendered due thanks to Sebastian, who interiorly told her that she would not die of that malady, but that on the 27th of the month, about eight in the morning, she would remain free from all disease, and would even be able to rise at once from her bed. Full of faith, the young woman held as certain what her heart dictated, and two days before her miraculous cure, although the fever had still continued to come on with the usual symptoms, seeing her father in great pain for her, she told him that on the morning of the next Monday, about eight o'clock, she should be perfectly restored; adding, "Dearest father, do believe me; for were I not certain of it, I would not say it." The poor father, who was pierced with grief, heard these words with pleasure, but gave no credit to them, the thing appearing to him absolutely impossible: and in fact, Monday being come, the in-

valid was found by the physician not at all better than usual. Nevertheless, not doubting of that with which Valfré had inspired her, she, with holy simplicity, kept reminding him that the hour was approaching. When lo, she who could not even raise an arm through her great weakness, felt her strength suddenly return: her legs regained life, the fever entirely ceased, and seating herself on her bed, she asked to be allowed to dress herself. Her mother, who was with her, did not believe what she saw; and as if beside herself with excess of joy, she said to her daughter, "But how is this? Is then what you said to your father true?" and beginning to ask her how she had been able thus to predict with exactitude the time of her cure, Domenica informed her of everything in its order, of the advice given to her by her uncle, of her prayer to the Blessed Sebastian, and of what he had spoken to her heart. Meanwhile, the report of this miracle, being in a moment everywhere spread abroad, the physicians who had attended her came to the place, and having found her entirely free from all disease, with which in the morning they had left her oppressed, they attested on oath that the cure could not have come about naturally, but must have been the effect of supernatural and miraculous energy; and the more so, because the sick person was even free from those inconveniences which after a long and mortal illness are ever wont to accompany convalescence.

Sister Coletta Fassolis, a nun of St. Clara d'

Alba, falling down a stair-case injured one leg, in which a deep wound formed itself, so that even the bone was laid open. After four months of most painful treatment, the surgeon told her that the wound was incurable. When the religious knew that no more was to be hoped for from human remedies, she thought of having recourse to such as are divine; and throwing aside bandages and plaisters, she wrapped round the diseased part a letter of the Blessed Sebastian's, trusting in him; this immediately caused all pain to cease, and three days after the leg was perfectly restored.

For several years Sister Maria Vescona of the Monastery of the Most Holy Crucifix, had suffered extremely acute pains from sciatica, which dreadfully tormented her. The disease being of very long standing, and many remedies having been uselessly employed, which indeed, so far from doing any good, had seemed rather to increase the disease; the surgeon at length said that it was better to lay aside all kind of treatment, in order not to irritate still more the part affected, with the risk of the patient's remaining a cripple. It happened that among this nun's companions there was one of great faith, a Giuseppina Monetti, who having compassion on her afflicted sister, took a letter of Father Valfré's which she had in her possession, and carrying it to the bed of the sick woman, said to her, "Take courage, Sister Maria, be not cast down; if human remedies fail, there remain divine ones, far more potent and efficacious than

the former. This letter which I hold in my hand was written by Father Sebastian the Filippino, who died in the repute of sanctity, and who has done so many miracles. Earthly physicians having abandoned you, let us turn to the heavenly: have faith, sister, and heartily recommend yourself to him of whom I speak, in order that, for the glory of the Lord, he may obtain health for you. See, I place this leaf on the suffering part; having firm hope, that for the merits of His servant, God may be willing to alleviate the acuteness of your pain, so that you may be able to have at least a little repose." This being said, and the letter being laid upon her, the sick person, who for several nights had not been able to close her eyes fell into a most placid slumber, on awaking from which she found herself free from all pain, and was able immediately to rise and to go with the other nuns to perform the community duties.

Giangiacomo Restaldo of Borgo Masino, was accustomed daily to recite three Paternosters, three Ave Marias, and three Glorias, in honour of the Blessed Sebastian, to whom he had a great devotion. Now finding himself (it was in the year 1716) oppressed by some infirmity to which he was subject, accompanied by continual fever and most troublesome pain in the head, it one day seemed to him, after having made his accustomed prayer to him, that he saw the Blessed Sebastian before his eyes with his usual heavenly expression; and the mere sight of him communicated such sweetness to his soul, that

he no longer felt the infirmities of the body. And wonderful is the fact, on the departure of this vision or lively imagination, as we may choose to call it, he found himself in truth free from all indisposition. But this was not the only favour which Restaldo obtained from Sebastian; he relates to us in the process something else, no less miraculous. Owing to a certain law-suit he was mortally hated by a malicious and vindictive man. Greatly fearing the snares of this person, and having to make a journey to some place, he first recommended himself to the servant of God, that he might deliver himself from every danger, and especially from the plots of his rival. Having set out, and got several miles from his home, he heard behind him the trampling of a horse which was coming on with unbridled speed. He turned and saw that he was followed by the very person whom he so much dreaded. He shuddered with fear, finding himself thus alone in the open country; and having neither place nor means for his defence, he turned to him whom he considered as his advocate and protector, with these words, "Blessed spirit, this is the moment in which to help me!" The thing was no sooner said than done. The air which had been most serene, became suddenly agitated, and an impetuous wind arose, which, raising the dust in a whirlwind, formed, as it were, a thick cloud in a meadow near to the public road. Certain that this was the secure spot prepared for his escape by Divine Providence through the intercession of Valfré, he made

towards it, and there, not being seen by the other person, he was able to save his life.

In 1721 Sister Cecilia of the Monastery of St. Clare, in the thirty-third year of her age, owing to an apoplectic stroke, remained with her mouth distorted, without being able to articulate a word, and without the use of one side; so that for several months she was obliged to remain motionless in her bed. While there was still some hope that she might derive some little advantage from the many remedies employed, the stroke was repeated, still more distorting her mouth, so that she could no longer open it, and shortening by half a span the leg of her lost side, in this state she remained as if insensible, and was not able to swallow even broth. The disease was now thought to be utterly incurable. One morning the sick woman being in the state described, fixed her eyes on the picture of Valfré which was hung on the curtain of her bed, and recollecting the many miracles done by him and always having had a particular devotion to him, she begged him not to cure her, (for this seemed to her too much to ask,) but to obtain for her from God patience and resignation in her most afflicting malady. While thus praying she seemed to hear an internal voice bidding her arise; she, however, took no notice of it, and for about an hour she kept her mind occupied in other thoughts; but again turning her eyes to the picture she again heard herself bidden to get up. Nevertheless, she regarded this second voice neither more nor less than the first. Finally,

a little more time having elapsed, again looking at the picture, she heard even more clearly than before the same thing said to her heart, with the addition, that she was cured, God being willing to be glorified by means of Father Valfré. So strong was this third impulse, that as if unable to resist it she determined to try to rise from her bed, to sit down, and to walk; and finding that she succeeded in all, she perceived the reality of the miracle, and immediately falling on her knees thanked God and her intercessor for it. But here occurred a very curious incident, which there is no necessity for relating, and it is this, that her aunt, Sister Clara Andrea, coming at this moment into the infirmary, and seeing her niece come joyfully and briskly to meet her, wishing to embrace her, alarmed at the novelty of the circumstance, ran in consternation to shut herself up in her own room, thinking the invalid by no means cured, but become a furious lunatic. Meanwhile, the other nuns entering and the miracle being known, they wished to know how it had happened; and everything being related to the superior and to the community, all went together to the church, where Sister Cecilia herself intoned the "Te Deum," all the rest responding. The physicians were at once sent for, who immediately coming, and seeing the nun cured, declared the cure to be a great miracle. Sister Clara then recovered from her fright and left her room, when she heard the cries and other tokens of rejoicing with which the monastery resounded.

The two first facts related in this chapter were diligently examined by the Sacred Congregation of Rites in 1827, in the pontificate of Leo XII. in the house of his Eminence the Cardinal Gianfrancesco Falzacappa, relator of the venerable Father Sebastian Valfré's cause: both were then again brought forward for renewed examination, in the Congregation of Cardinals held at the Vatican under Pius VIII. of pious memory, on the 9th of June, 1829, the third feast of Pentecost: and finally again proposed in the general congregation held in the Apostolic Palace at the Quirinal in the presence of the above-mentioned High Pontiff, on the 22nd of April, 1830, which fell on the Tuesday after Low Sunday. Monsignor Virgilio Pescetelli, as promoter of the faith, having learnedly stated all the objections that he held to be such, it was acknowledged that in the two instantaneous and perfect cures all the signs concurred for adjudging them to be true and certain miracles. But in a matter of so much weight and importance, although both the cardinals and the consultors had all been of unanimous consent, the Pope, nevertheless, abstained from pronouncing his judgment, still desiring to make supplication to God, in order to have the lights necessary for still better knowing the truth. Meanwhile the feast of the apostle and protector of Rome, St. Philip Neri, arrived, and Pius VIII. determined on this day to declare his mind and to give his final sentence. "We have chosen this day," (thus speaks the Pope,) "both in order to fill the Fil-

ippini with new joy, and because we are justly persuaded that the glory of the venerable Sebastian adds to that of St. Philip, as the glory of a son increases that of the father. The rules and the institute of St. Philip showed to Sebastian the most easy and secure way to attain this glory," &c. Then having called to him their Eminences the cardinals Giuseppe Albani, secretary of state, and pro-prefect of the Holy Congregation of Rites, and Gianfrancesco Falzacappa, relator of the cause; together with Monsignor Pescetelli, promoter of the faith, and Monsignor Giuseppe Fatati, secretary of the same congregation,—after having celebrated the divine Sacrifice, he pronounced, that of the three miracles proposed, it was most certain and manifest that two were such in the third kind; that is, the instantaneous and perfect cure of the nun, Maria Felice Panuzia, recovered from paralysis of the whole left side, together with habitual weakness of the right side; and the instantaneous and perfect cure of Dominica Lucia Fassi, cured of malignant fever, added to a total paralysis of her legs.

"Cum itaque," thus speaks the decree, "immaculatam obtulisset Hostiam Sanctissimus Dominus noster, accersitis ad se Reverendissimis Cardinalibus Josepho Albani a secretis status Sacrorum Rituum Congregationis Propraefecto, et Joanne Francisco Falzacappa, causae relatore, necnon R. P. Virgilio Pascetelli Sanctae Fidei Promotore, una mecum infrascripto secretario, rite pronunciavit: Ex tribus miraculis propositis

constare de duobus in tertio genere ; scilicet de secundo instantaneae perfectaeque sanationis coenobiticae virginis Mariae Felicis Panutiae a paralysi totius sinistri lateris corporis, simulque ab asthemia, seu debilitate habituali lateris dexteri : ac de tertio instantaneae perfectacque sanationis Dominicae Luciae Fassi a febri acuta maligna cum inferiorum artuum perfecta paralysi."

The most blessed Father Gregory XVI. determined to bring this cause quickly to an end, and therefore having convoked the general Sacred Congregation of Rites on the 27th day of April, 1831, and having proposed the doubt, "If considering the approbation of the virtues in heroic degree, and of the two declared miracles, it were safe to proceed to the beatification of the servant of God ;" although all the consultors who had come in great number, gave an affirmative answer, his holiness, still better to consider the thing, deferred his judgment to the 26th of May, which was the Thursday after Whitsunday ; and on that day he decided, that it was perfectly safe to proceed to the solemn beatification to be made at the appointed time, as is to be seen in the decree which we shall here affix.

Such is the Life of the Blessed Sebastian Valfré which we have endeavoured to write with the utmost brevity and perspicuity. We fancy we may assure ourselves that the reader must have highly admired the virtues of this great priest ; but particularly the two which especially shone forth in him, I mean humility and charity. This sentiment may lead the way to the

imitation of him, and this is the true fruit of reading the Lives of the Saints. For if this admiration terminates in itself, without producing any good, we then make ourselves guilty of a new fault; the having, that is, rendered useless a means of improvement.

DECRETUM

TAURINEN

BEATIFICATIONIS ET CANONIZATIONIS

VEN. SERVI DEI

SEBASTIANI VALFRÉ,

PRESBYTERI CONGREGATIONIS ORATORII.

SUPER DUBIO
AN, STANTE APPROBATIONE VIRTUTUM ET DUORUM MIRACULORUM, TUTO PROCEDI POSSIT AD VEN. SERVI DEI BEATIFICATIONIS?

Deus, qui habitare facit unanimes in domo, ut ei certatim deserviant, VEN. SEBASTIANUM VALFRE inter S. Philippi Neri alumnos ab adolescentia vocavit; tantumque Institutorem ipse imitatus adeo virtutibus excellerit, ut in eis heroicum altigisse gradum affirmaverit Sa. Me. Pius P. P. VI. Decreto edito *Pridie Idus Aprilis anni* 1784.

Integram vitam ejusdem Ven. Viri usque ad senectam piis operibus insumptam pretiosa mors coronavit: memoria autem in benedictione jugiter permansit, et illius nomen exinde invocatum miseris atque ægris opem præbuit, ac restituit valetudinem, pluribus patratis miraculis; quorum duo presertim apud Sacrorum Rituum Conventum

iterum ac tertio consueta lance librata et perspecta Sa. Me. Pio VIII., decreto emisso *Septimo Kalendas Junii* superioris *anni* 1830, visum fuit approbare.

Attamen priusquam Christianæ Fidei Heroes ad Altarium honores extollantur, consuetudine jamdiu receptum est, ut adhuc agitetur dubium "*An stante approbatione virtutum et duorum miraculorum, tuto procedi possit ad Ven. Servi Dei beatificationem?*"

Generalis itaque S. R. Congregatio coram Sanctissimo Domino nostro Gregorio P. P. XVI. convocata fuit *Sexto Kalendas Maii* currentis *anni* 1831 in Apostolico Palatio Quirinali, ubi Reverendissimi Cardinales Sacris Ritibus tuendis addicti, aliique Patres Consultores frequentissimi adstiterunt, atque omnes concordes proposito dubio *tuto procedi posse* responderunt. Quibus auditis Sanctissimus Dominus de more Antecessorum suorum distulit supremam promere sententiam, ut interea Deo preces adhiberentur ad supernum lumen in re gravissima implorandum. Hoc vero tempore, quo Spiritus Domini replevit orbem terrarum, mentem suam patefacere statuit, ut S. Philippi Neri alumnos, ipsius memoriam festiva celebritate recolentes, pleno gaudio perfunderet et glorioso Ven. Sebastiani exemplo magis magisque excitaret.

Quapropter Feria V. Pentecostes sacris peractis accersivit ad se Reverendissimos Cardinales Carolum M. Pedicini Episcopum Prænestinum S. R. C. Præfectum, et Joannem Franciscum Falzacappa Episcopum Albanensem Caussæ Relatorem,

necnon R. P. Virgilium Pescetelli S. Fidei Promotorem, meque infrascriptum Secretarium, ac rite decrevit, "*Tuto procedi posse ad Venerabilis Sebastiani Valfré beatificationem.*"

Hoc insuper Decretum evulgari atque in Acta Sac. Rit. Congregationis referri, necnon Litteras Apostolicas in forma Brevis de Beatificatione in Basilica Vaticana opportuno tempore celebranda expediri jussit. *Septimo Kalendas Junii,* 1831.

C. M. Episcopus Prænest. Card. Pedicini Præf.

Loco ✠ *Sigilli.*

Joseph Gaspar Fatati, S. R. C. Secretarius.

THE LIFE

OF

F. ANTONIO MARIA CORTIVO DE' SANTI,

FOUNDER OF THE CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY OF ST. PHILIP NERI, IN THE CITY OF PADUA.

PROTESTATIO.

Cum SS. D. N. Urbanus Papa VIII. die 13 Martii 1625 in Sacra Congregatione S. R. et Universalis Inquisitionis Decretum ediderit, idemque confirmaverit die 5 Junii 1634 quo inhibuit imprimi libros Hominum, qui Sanctitate, seu Martyrii fama celebres e vita migraverunt, gesta, miracula, vel revelationes, seu quæcumque beneficia, tanquam eorum intercessionibus a Deo accepta continentes, sine recognitione, atque approbatione Ordinarii, et quæ hactenus sine ea impressa sunt, nullo modo vult censeri approbata. Idem autem Sanctissimus die 5 Junii 1631 ita explicaverit, ut nimirum non admittantur Elogia Sancti, vel Beati absolute, et quæ cadunt super Personam, bene tamen ea, quæ cadunt super mores, et opinionem; cum protestatione in principio, quod iis nulla adsit auctoritas ab Ecclesia Romana, sed fides tantum sit penes Auctorem. Huic Decreto, ejusque confirmationi, et declarationi, observantia, et reverentia, qua pars est, insistendo; profiteor me haud alio sensu, quidquid in hoc libro refero, accipere, aut accipi ab ullo velle, quam quo ea solent, quæ humana dumtaxat auctoritate, non autem Divina Catholicæ Romanæ Ecclesiæ, aut Sanctæ Sedis Apostolicæ, nituntur. Iis tantummodo exceptis, quos eadem Sancta Sedes, Sanctorum, Beatorum, aut Martyrum catalogo adscripsit.

THE LIFE

OF

FATHER ANTONIO DE' SANTI.

CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND STUDIES OF ANTONIO MARIA CORTIVO DE' SANTI.—THROUGH THE PRAYERS AND EXHORTATIONS OF HIS MOTHER, HE GIVES HIMSELF UP TO A LIFE OF DEVOTION, AND IS ORDAINED PRIEST.

The family of the Cortivi is one of the many noble houses which with their splendour adorn the ancient city of Padua. It is divided into many branches, one of which is distinguished from the rest by the surname of de' Santi, from the circumstance, that the house in their possession is situated in the street of the B. Antonio Pellegrino, which was originally painted and adorned outside with the pictures of saints. From a family thus pious and illustrious did the venerable servant of God, Antonio Maria Cortivo de' Santi, trace his origin. His parents, who were ennobled by their piety as well as the antiquity of their house, were Bernardino Cortivo de' Santi, and Elisabetta Buonamica, a native of Bassano. He first beheld the light of this world on the

4th of November, A.D. 1586, and was brought up in the city of Padua, in the very house which originally gave his family the name of de' Santi, a name which after the birth of Antonio, might be given to it with still greater propriety, inasmuch as he was a living and animated picture of the saints, of whose virtues he presented a copy in his own person, if not of their external features.

In truth, from his very infancy he was declared to be dear to heaven, and experienced the protection of her who is Empress of Paradise. In his third year he was attacked with a malady, which caused his mother the greatest affliction, as soon as she became aware of it. She loved him tenderly; but like a pious and prudent woman, instead of relying on earthly remedies, had recourse to the patronage of the Virgin, to whom she was in the highest degree devoted. At that time the picture of the Madonna of Lendimara, a village twenty-five miles from Padua, was in great celebrity, the Queen of Mercy having been pleased to grant many graces to those who had recourse to this her sacred effigy. Thither accordingly did the afflicted mother resolve to take her sick infant, in the fullest confidence of obtaining from this heavenly physician the means of his recovery. Nor were her expectations in the least disappointed. Nay, she even experienced her patronage beyond what she had asked in her prayers; since she not only delivered the infant from the severe sickness which afflicted him, but preserved both mother

and child from the most imminent danger of perishing in the water.

After she had set out on her journey towards the Polesine, where the village of Lendimara is situated, she was overtaken by night in her carriage, while still in the territory of Padua, in the direction of the Adige. There are in those parts many streams, over which various bridges have been built; so that the passage is not a little difficult, especially in the darkness of night. Thus it happened that the driver took her over a bridge which was so ruinous and decayed, that it was deemed a miracle that the carriage was not violently precipitated into the stream. This grace was an earnest of that which was to follow. After Elizabetta had arrived at the Church of the Virgin, and had stimulated her faith by ardent prayers; as if confident of having obtained the grace, she took from the child the ligature with which the suffering limb was bound, when it was discovered, not without astonishment, that he was entirely healed; nor was he ever again attacked by this malady.

God, having destined this child to do great things for His service, endowed him from his birth with an excellent disposition; so that, even in his tender years, he had a certain horror of imperfections, which held him back from them, together with a love of virtue, which sweetly disposed him to cultivate it. Hence it was, that even in his childhood, he gave proof of more than childlike virtues. For, having an elder brother of an impetuous and fiery temper, though he

often received from him the greatest provocations, he supported with the patience of mature age every wrong which, in the confidence of his more advanced age, and stimulated by his hasty disposition, he chose to inflict upon him. Thus at the very dawn of life, he accustomed himself to endure with a patience worthy of the mature Christian, all the crosses which came in his way.

To this goodness of disposition, in order that it might become perfect according to the designs of grace, God ordained that a good education should be added, a matter on which the welfare of children depends. Accordingly his parents showed themselves watchful and exact in bringing him up, taking care, in the first place, to make him walk in the observance of the Divine law, and secondly, to have him instructed in human sciences. Thus, as he was a child of excellent abilities, and provided with excellent masters, in a short time he learned the Latin language, and was able to apply himself to the study of philosophy. He then proceeded to the study of the civil and canon law, following the example of many of his ancestors, who were eminent in this profession and doctors of the college of law.

His masters were Ottonello Discalzi, Antonio Otelio, Giacomo Gallo, Bartolomeo Salvatico, and Giovanni Cartolari, public lecturers of great reputation, under whose instruction his great talents made such progress, that he distinguished himself above all others, in the academy which was then held in the house of the Cavaliere Giovanni Paolo Trevisi, giving proof of more

than ordinary eloquence in speaking, and of perspicuity in disputing on the questions proposed for discussion. Already it was predicted from this auspicious beginning, not only that he would obtain with honour the distinction of the doctor's degree, but that he would become most eminent in the profession of the law. But Divine Providence, foreseeing that this degree would be an impediment to his spiritual interests, caused him to break off the study of the law, in order to apply himself to a better. He himself, after he had founded the Congregation of the Oratory, and become the father of many spiritual children, both felt and acknowledged that this interruption was the design of Divine Providence; for he said, that had he pursued his studies and received the degree of doctor, as he intended, he should never have persevered in the spiritual life, but should have been not a little distracted from the practices of devotion and piety by the business of the courts, after the example of his contemporaries in this study. Wonderful indeed was the manner in which God withdrew him from his studies, in order that he might learn the science of the saints; inasmuch as to retard his progress, He made use of one who would naturally be most eager to promote it, namely, his own mother.

Although one who feared God, she had not hitherto been averse to the dress and ornaments used by the ladies of her rank at that time; but God, who wished first to lead to perfection the mother, and then by her means the

son, brought it to pass, that she should frequently enjoy the advantage of the holy conversation of the mother Suor Dominica Benzoni, a religious of great spirituality, and foundress of the eremitical nuns of the city of Padua. In the familiar conversations which passed between them, the good religious did not neglect to warn her friend, that she ought to be more moderate in the use of such ornaments, setting before her, with this view, the great merit which those acquire who despise vanities, while they serve God in the married state; since thus they serve for an example to the rest of the family, to consecrate themselves to the service of the Most High, and to embrace the practice of virtue. It was no difficult task to persuade Elizabetta; for knowing how true were the words of her monitress, with a generous resolution, she laid aside her former rich clothes, and began to use garments of simple wool. But it seemed to her too little to have changed the exterior only; for, withdrawing herself from the parties and conversations of the world, she gave herself up to interior recollection, employing many hours in prayer. Moreover, she took care to keep with all diligence her heart and senses, in order that the soul, free from external hinderances, might be found more disposed to raise and unite itself with God. Nor did she neglect the government of her family, knowing well, that according to the teaching of the Apostle, to take care of those of one's own household, is not only not contrary to the Gospel, but in strict accordance with it.

From the holy converse, which Elizabetta had with God by means of prayer, there sprang up, as a proper effect of it, a disrelish for things temporal; so that her heart no longer felt pleasure of any kind in the amusements of the world. On the contrary, having acquired a great esteem for things eternal and spiritual, she found her only delight in frequenting the Sacraments, in the exercise of works of mercy, and especially, in instructing poor girls in the mysteries of our holy faith. This she did on all feast days, going for this purpose immediately after dinner to her own parish church, to the great admiration of those who beheld a lady of high rank thus employed in the apostolic ministry.

The mother thus captivated by divine grace, and walking with hasty steps in the way of perfection, influenced by the desire of gaining her son, to become the father of many spiritual children, by means the most gentle endeavoured to implant in his heart a profound veneration for priests. Thus, not content with bowing to them, and asking with earnestness the help of their prayers, whenever she met one of them she would prostrate herself on the ground, and would not rise until she had obtained his benediction, and would then beseech him to remember herself, her sons, and her family in the divine Sacrifice.

Accordingly, from this veneration for the sacerdotal state, there awoke in her a holy and ardent desire, that one of her sons should dedicate himself to the altar, deeming those mothers truly

happy who had the lot of seeing their sons adorned with the character of the priesthood. Often when she saw her son Antonio Maria applying with such diligence to the study of human sciences, with maternal and heartfelt emotion she would say to him, "Ah, my son, what consolation should I experience, could I see you applying yourself to the study of heavenly things, and showing a disposition towards the religious life!"

Antonio was of a very mirthful disposition, and so took delight in music and singing, and in conversing with companions inclined to the same pastimes; and moreover, stimulated by the desire of distinction, he aspired to receive the degree of doctor, by means of which he thought a way would be opened to the honours which he contemplated. His mother's exhortations were therefore regarded as a constant impediment; and although they could make no impression on his heart to subdue it, nevertheless they became tedious and displeasing to him. Accordingly he was careful to avoid meeting his mother, and did not allow her admonitions to reach his ears. But let the soul, perverse as she pleases to be, attempt to escape, still grace with arrows of love knows how to overtake her, and make her a prey, little as she expects it.

It might have seemed from long experience, that the words of the mother of Antonio must be in vain: nevertheless at a time, which might have appeared least hopeful, they proved so efficacious as to make him surrender. It happened at the gayest season of the year, when to

men of the world masquerades seem but harmless and suitable entertainments, that one day the mother and the son had betaken themselves to pursuits widely different indeed, but according to the inclinations which ruled each of them at the time. She was preparing to go to church to hear a spiritual discouse, which was to be delivered in the church of St. Agnes, by a most devoted and exemplary priest called Marco Manzoni; while he disguised as a countryman, according to the practice of the light-hearted youth of Padua, was on the point of betaking himself to the piazza. At this moment Elizabeth met her son; and inopportune as it was, to invite one dressed in this manner to go to hear sermons, nevertheless the courageous woman, encouraged by the divine grace which assisted her, attempted the hard task. It was not with imperious commands or words of authority, but with respectful, tender, and humble entreaties that the prudent matron undertook to assail his heart.

As if forgetful that she was his mother, although never more faithfully than at that moment did she fulfil the duties of a mother, she threw herself at the feet of her own child, and earnestly besought him, for the love of Jesus Christ, to take off the dress he wore and accompany her to church, to hear this devout discourse, and to give up to God and his own mother the momentary recreation she asked of him.

She added weight to these maternal entreaties by justly assuring him, that if at this instant he gained the victory over himself, the pain which

he then felt, in depriving himself of this brief amusement, would be soon changed into lasting satisfaction.

But so engrossed was the youthful mind of Antonio in this trifling pastime, that he was not overcome, but only saddened. He was grieved with his mother, as too severe and importunate in not being willing to concede to his youth and the season of the carnival this short recreation, enjoyed by almost all his companions. Instead of yielding, Elizabeth redoubled her entreaties, and urged him with still greater fervour of spirit; and so persuasive was she, that the youth from inward remorse, not having confidence to refuse her, resolved to obey. Accordingly, tearing off his outer dress, and casting aside the mask which covered his frank countenance, he offered himself ready to follow her.

If his mother rejoiced at the victory which Antonio gained over himself, much more did God, who instantly rewarded him for it, by changing him in such a manner, as to make him give himself entirely to God; for when he arrived at the church to hear the sermon, the devout priest spoke of the love of God and the vanities of the world, and showed by arguments so effectual, how the world deserves to be hated and God to be sought after, that his words, invigorated by grace, were like arrows in the heart of Antonio, and so thoroughly changed him, that he seemed to be no longer the same person as before. The bare recollection of the recreation which he had longed after so short a time before, caused him disgust,

and instead of thinking more of pastimes, no sooner had he returned home, than he began to turn over in his mind and meditate on the truths he had heard in this efficacious sermon. His face was no longer disguised with a mask, but suffused with ingenuous shame, blushing for having until then spent his time in the like follies, instead of passing it in loving and serving his God. This clear conviction was followed by an effectual resolution to change his life, and to consecrate to the Most High all the time of life which should remain to him.

The first step he took after this firm resolution was to betake himself to the house of Manzoni, the parish-priest of Sant' Agnese, by whose powerful words he had been convinced. When he presented himself to him, he was most kindly received; and by his familiar conversation, new motives were added to the desire he had, to consecrate himself wholly to the service of God.

He invited him to attend an Oratory, which was held in one of the lower rooms of his house, in which a few persons were accustomed to assemble. These few however were select, and worthy of respect both for their birth and their merit. Among them were Luigi da Ponte, dean of the Cathedral, a man remarkable for his learning and piety, who in Rome had been a disciple and spiritual child of St. Philip, Girolamo Michele, a noble Venetian, and Antonio Borromeo, Theologian, both Canons of the same Cathedral.

Antonio Maria accepted this kind invitation, and by frequenting this place, in which they

were accustomed to spend half an hour in mental prayer, and to speak of spiritual subjects, and the manner of overcoming the passions and acquiring virtue, he in a short time made so great progress, as not only to detach himself from his former companions and banish their music and singing, but order his life in such a manner, as to become a perfect pattern. Into the hands of this same curate he resigned the reins of his will, to turn it as and where he pleased; and in order to receive his instructions he betook himself to him every day without fail, and reverently kneeling on both knees assisted at all the masses, which were celebrated in his church. On festivals he was the first and most zealous to attend the Oratory, in which his spirit delighted, taking pleasure in the spiritual conferences which the good curate introduced among the brothers. At the end of these he returned home, and there in a remote chamber, without communication with the family, he lived in retirement, spending his time most profitably in holy prayers and meditations, and in reading spiritual books.

When the hour of dinner arrived, he was called to table by his good mother, and went carrying with him a spiritual book. This he read for a quarter of an hour after the benediction was given, while the others were eating; and then after having thus refreshed the spirit, he allowed a moderate or rather scanty repast to his body. When the dinner was ended and thanks offered to the Giver of all good, he retired to his beloved apartment and was not again seen about the house.

But the chief delight of his soul was in frequently refreshing himself with the Eucharistic Manna; and his good guide and master perceiving the fruit he gathered from it, permitted this servant of God with greater frequency to approach the sacred Table. Nevertheless, in order to temper the sweet with the bitter, as well as to render him better disposed to relish this heavenly sweetness, the wise and skilful director was accustomed to exercise him with heavy external mortifications, which, though severe to sense and to his youth, this good young man nevertheless willingly embraced and underwent, knowing as he did, that to the eyes of men of the world, they must have seemed follies.

He frequently ordered him to take a basket, and go without his cloak to the piazza, to buy vegetables or some other kind of food, and take it home with him. How humiliating this dress and this employment must be to a gentleman of Padua, any one may easily perceive; yet notwithstanding this, the pious youth willingly embraced so sensible a mortification; and although at times, his condition being well known, he met friends or fellow-pupils who jeered when they saw him, yet the outward shame which such jests naturally cause, was more than compensated to him by that inward cheerfulness which virtuous deeds ever produce. At other times his prudent director would oblige him, while he was presiding at the Oratory, to stand in the cemetery of the church of St. Agnes, and to invite and even entreat all who passed, to enter

and take part in those profitable exercises. He was prompt in obeying his commands, and derived from his obedience exactly what Manzoni looked for; for as he often invited men of the world, to whom his entreaties were displeasing, they derided him and loaded him with mockery and insults; while the humble disciple, fixing the eyes of his soul on the humility and contempt endured by his Redeemer, willingly submitted to these jests for the love of Him.

The good mother beheld the holy zeal with which her son applied himself to things spiritual, and was filled with joy at seeing her desires accomplished. But her holy delight increased when she saw that Antonio, not content with his own sanctification, in order to advance that of others, every evening before supper assembled the family in his room, where he made all recite some prayers, and then taught them, how to make with advantage the examination of conscience, by taking account not only of their faults, but of their slight defects, and after having noted them, to bewail and detest them as offences against the Divine Majesty. He also urged them to conform their own will with that of God, and to resign themselves no less when things prosper, than when they are unsuccessful, to the Divine good pleasure.

But the walls of his room were too narrow a limit for the charity he felt for his neighbour, which soon began to show the bright flame which burned in his breast, in the Oratory which he attended; for in the discussions and spiritual

conferences, which were there held, his words were so fervent, as to inflame with devotion all who heard him. Besides this, being well aware that in the time of sickness, there is a wider field for relieving the needs, spiritual and temporal, of our neighbour, he began attentively to watch for and embrace occasions of serving the sick, particularly when they were near the point of death. Accordingly at that time he assisted them with the greatest and most unwearied diligence, taking care that they should receive the powerful aid of the most holy Sacraments, and that they should make the awful passage to eternity, fortified with acts of the theological virtues, and resting upon the infinite merits of their Redeemer.

Moreover, he gave a strong proof of the ardent desire he had for the salvation of souls, while he was still a secular, and, as it were, at the first start he made on the road of perfection. It was as follows: His elder brother having for some cause or other taken offence against a gentleman of Padua, the report of the quarrel was spread through the city, and immediately there hastened to his house many of his relations and friends, who readily declared themselves willing to shed their blood in his defence. Antonio saw and remarked their readiness to sacrifice their lives for love of their relations and friends, and, when he went to the Oratory, used it as a most effectual argument, to stimulate his companions to procure the salvation of souls, contrasting with tender and heartfelt emotion, the zeal with which

men of the world offer their lives for the service of another man, with the tepidity with which even those who make profession of the spiritual life, seek the welfare of souls and the glory of God, testifying the grief which his heart felt in observing so great a diversity.

Antonio had now for six years been employed in the above-mentioned works of devotion, always attending the Oratory of St. Agnes, and striving with acts of charity to be ever adding new flames to the fire of love which burned in its breast, when in the year 1609 the death of the curate Manzoni took place, the man whose words he recognised as the instrument of his change, and under whose guidance he had persevered in the exemplary course of life which he had embraced. His loss was deeply felt by all the brothers of that Oratory, but in particular by Antonio.

They found no small difficulty in assembling for their devout exercises, for want of a suitable place of meeting; for as the curate who succeeded Manzoni did not inherit the same spirit, they had been several times obliged through various impediments to change their room. Moreover, they found a scarcity of priests to hear their confessions and dispense the Bread of Angels; and this it was which afflicted the heart of Antonio. Manzoni, knowing his virtue, had been most liberal in allowing him to approach the sacred table, permitting him to do so every morning, although at that time it was not the custom in Padua, for seculars to receive the

Eucharist on week days; but now he had the greatest difficulty in finding a priest who would grant him this consolation. Hence he languished of hunger for this heavenly refreshment.

He went about now to one church and now to another, and with humble entreaties besought the rectors of them to communicate him; and often for this purpose he spent entire mornings on his knees before the altar, on which love, so to speak, holds the God of infinite Majesty imprisoned for the good of men. There he would wait sighing and praying, until some kind priest would administer to him the Divine Food, his soul languishing with love, until strengthened and restored thereby. Antonio was destined to promote in no small degree the frequenting of the Divine Sacrament, and to lead many devout souls, with the advice of their own confessors, to receive daily. In order therefore that he might become a worthy Minister of it, God was pleased that he should first experience the scarcity, and so by his prayers obtain from God for the faithful, a longing desire and due dispositions to receive frequently the Heavenly Food, and for the priests who are the dispensers of it, sentiments at once prudent and liberal in administering it.

He now began to entertain thoughts of entering the priesthood; both because he should then enjoy the privilege of uniting himself daily with his Lord in the Sacrament, and because he should be able to dispense it with greater liberality to many souls, whom he knew by the

purity of their lives to be capable of receiving it. The ardent desire which he had to assist his neighbour, rendered him still more desirous to receive this sacred character; for he knew that when adorned with this dignity his words would have greater force, especially in the spiritual conferences held in the Oratory, than they had from the lips of a layman, also that his charity would have wider scope to employ itself in many different ways, for the spiritual good of his neighbour. An obstacle however to these thoughts, which choked them, as it were, as they sprung up, was his profound humility, which made him esteem himself unworthy of a degree, which might fill with awe even one who had the sanctity of the seraphim. While his mind was thus fluctuating, he was wise enough to have recourse to prayer, imploring the Majesty of God to enlighten him, that he might have strength to fulfil His Divine Will. He then determined to manifest his perplexities to the Count Trojano Borromeo, who joined with nobility of birth the holy fear of God, and who was his most confidential friend, and to another brother of the Oratory, a man of great spirituality, from both of whom he received the advice of true friends; for although they exhorted him to enter the ecclesiastical state, they reminded him, that in order to proceed with greater caution and prudence it would be best to ascertain the Will of God from his own Pastor.

At that time the Bishop of Padua was Monsignor Marco Cornaro, a prelate of the highest

qualifications. To him accordingly Antonio had recourse, and signified to him how strongly he felt himself stimulated to enter the priesthood, not from ambition of dignities or desire of the ecclesiastical revenues, but from a wish to assist his neighbour; adding, that the knowledge he had of his own misery, retarded him from prosecuting his design. The good prelate heard with kindness what Antonio declared to him, and being satisfied of his right intention embraced him with tenderness, and not only approved of his wish, but persuaded him to put it into immediate execution. Moreover, not being able to suppress the consolation he felt, he declared that he had that day met with a just cause for rejoicing; for that this was the first time during the many years he had ruled that diocese, that a person of rank had presented himself to him, who desired to receive the priesthood, without wishing to make use of it as a stepping stone to reach ecclesiastical dignities, and to grasp the possessions of the Church.

The sea is not so quickly restored to tranquillity after the blast of contrary winds, as was the breast of Antonio after having learned the Will of God from the lips of his own prelate, and having resolved promptly to execute the counsels of Heaven. The good bishop was on the point of going to Rome to visit the sacred threshold of the Apostles; but in order that the execution of the holy purpose of Antonio might not be delayed, he left him letters dimissory for his ordination. For this purpose he went to Verona, where at that

time happened to be Monsignor Bartolomeo Cartolario, bishop of Chioza, from whom he received the first clerical tonsure and the minor orders. His companion in this journey was the Count Trojano Borromeo, to whom as an intimate friend he had confided his resolution, and who not only desired to accompany him, but moreover provided him with a dress suitable to the new service, under which he enrolled himself.

When he returned to his own country with the new character and in the dress of an ecclesiastic, his mother, who was not aware of the cause of his journey, remained, so to say, overcome with the unexpected and unmeasured joy which she felt at seeing him in that dress, trusting that in a short time her prayers would be accomplished by the highly prized prerogative of being mother of a priest. And in fact she soon received this consolation; for, having obtained the brief of permission to receive the three sacred orders on three successive festivals, he was in a short time ordained priest, and celebrated his first mass on the 29th of May, A.D. 1614. This was a day peculiarly adapted for this solemnity, as on that day was kept the feast of Corpus Domini, on which the Church, hindered, as it were, on Holy Thursday, by the remembrance of the Passion of her Divine Spouse, from celebrating the institution of the Divine Sacrament, holds a solemn feast in commemoration of it. He prepared himself in anticipation of this great action, by macerating his body by penance to render it more obedient to the

spirit, and by raising himself above earthly affections, by means of prolonged meditations and prayers. And because sometimes, from the solemnities with which the first Mass is celebrated, not a few distractions trouble the new priest, he chose for the first time to celebrate privately, offering to the Eternal Father the precious victim of His Son in the church of the nuns of the Blessed Antonio Pelligrino. As it is true that God dispenses His favours according to the disposition he finds in the soul, and as he was so well prepared; infinite, so to speak, was the joy which the Lord permitted his soul to taste in this tremendous function.

He had been urged to receive the priesthood by the desire he had to assist his neighbour, and to have the means of promoting the frequenting of the Divine Sacrament; and as a hidden flame cannot long withhold itself from breaking out, no sooner was he seen for the first time at the altar, than he plainly manifested his ardour. Having finished reading the Gospel, he turned towards the people and began to reason on the love which is due to God, and on devotion to Christ in the Sacrament, and this he did with such fervour of spirit, as to melt the heart of the bystanders. When the discourse was finished he proceeded with the Divine Sacrifice, and having himself partaken of the Bread of Angels, he dispensed it to the longing faithful, who desired to be partakers of his table. That morning more than a hundred and fifty persons received the Eucharist at his hands, while the boundless ar-

dour of his soul showed itself on his countenance, which was so lighted up as to appear to send forth rays of fire. Great indeed was the joy he felt, on seeing himself made by the Divine Mercy a minister qualified to dispense this Food to devout and longing souls.

CHAPTER II.

THE NEW PRIEST DEVOTES HIMSELF ENTIRELY TO ADVANCE THE SALVATION OF SOULS.—HE FOUNDS THE ORATORY OF ST. JEROME IN THE CITY OF PADUA, IN WHICH HE ESTABLISHES MANY SPIRITUAL EXERCISES, AFTER THE MODEL OF WHICH MANY WERE FOUNDED IN OTHER PLACES.—HE COMPOSES A VERY DEVOUT AND PROFITABLE BOOK.

Together with his new character, Antonio justly deemed that he had laid upon himself, as it were, by his office the double burthen of securing his own salvation and that of others. Accordingly he devoted himself more than ever to retirement, and to the keeping of his own heart; and afterwards to the advancement, by means of his own toils and fatigues, of the sanctification of others, dedicating to so noble an object his pen no less than his tongue.

But observe, how at the very outset God designed to prove him in humility, and to teach him that he ought to confide in God rather than in his own efforts! Soon after he was ordained priest, the fame of his inspiring and ardent elo-

quence having already begun to be spread abroad, he was requested by the nuns of the B. Antonio Pellegrino to deliver a spiritual discourse. As he was desirous of lending his assistance to all, he knew not how to refuse these Mothers this spiritual benefit; but as he was still a novice in this art, he thought it suitable not only to prepare himself, but to commit to memory the whole sermon word for word. God however, who wished that he should rely upon Him rather than his own efforts, although He had bestowed upon him the gift of speaking with great force, without committing his words to memory, brought it to pass, that at the very beginning of his discourse, his memory should fail him, so that he was unable to proceed. This accident had not the effect of making him reluctant to continue this sacred employment, but of manifesting at once his humility and his great abilities. For having with humble frankness acknowledged to the Mothers the failure of his memory, he chose another subject without preparation, and preached with such eloquence and fervour of spirit, as to cause astonishment to the religious who heard him speak in so exalted a strain, showing plainly not only his great talents, but the grace of God which assisted him in this unpremeditated discourse.

Having learned by experience how much souls had been profited by frequenting the Oratory, which, originally founded at St. Agnes, had, after the death of the curate Manzoni, been removed from place to place, he had nothing more at heart than to find a permament place for it, that the

advantage derived from it might be enduring also. The zealous practice of assembling secular persons on feast days to praise God in such an Oratory, had been introduced the century before in the neighbouring city of Vicenza by the Venerable Father Antonio Pagani, of the Seraphic Order of Friars Minor of the Observance, a man of holy life and zealous for the salvation of his neighbour. From Vicenza it was propagated in Padua, in the year 1602, by Father Michael Angelo, a Capuchin, the brethren assembling in the house of the Canon Quarantaotto near the church of S. Giovanni della Morte, and then in other places successively, until they were assembled by the Curate Manzoni in his house, where the Oratory continued as long as he lived. When he quitted this life, the brethren met at St. Ermagora, and lastly in the parish church of St. Jerome.

Many were the attempts of Antonio to establish a fixed place for his beloved Oratory, zealously did he labour to see his desires fulfilled, and many were the spots to which he turned his eyes; but in all he met with insuperable obstacles, until God, who designed to second his holy desires, stirred up the heart of a knight of Padua, named Emilio Dotto, to afford him timely assistance in the desired undertaking. Being an intimate friend of the servant of God, and seeing how great was his grief at not finding a suitable and permanent place for the Oratory, on the 28th of September, 1615, he generously made him a present of some cottages of his behind his palace.

Father Santi immediately returned due thanks to God and then to his benefactor, and having obtained the needful permissions, devoted his thoughts to the building of the Oratory of St. Jerome; and although he required a large sum of money to complete it, nevertheless he saw it accomplished in so short a time, that on the 24th of August in the following year the first Mass was celebrated there and the spiritual exercises held. Many persons contributed their alms for this building, but the largest were those of the Count Trojano Borromeo, his dearest friend, and Lodovico Rivi, called the Englishman, a merchant of high reputation, who lived in Venice at St. Moses. He was so moved by hearing Father Santi discourse upon heavenly things, and the spiritual advantages which were gained from the Oratory, that he generously supplied a large sum for the edifice, and dying soon afterwards left an income sufficient to provide for the daily celebration of the Divine Sacrifice in the same Oratory.

But the thoughts of Antonio were not only directed to the material building of this sacred place, but much more to the spiritual edification of the brethren who resorted thither; so that he began to consider in what manner he might be best able to promote their eternal welfare. It seemed to him that the instructions brought from Vicenza, when the Oratory was set up in Padua, were too vague; since they only directed that after singing the office of the Most Holy Virgin, and making half an hour's mental prayer,

there should be a discourse on some spiritual subject, and that after vespers a devout book should be read, and that afterwards, the advantage gained from this reading should be tested by means of conferences.

Accordingly he thought it would be very advantageous, to find a means of teaching every one, seculars in particular, the method of making mental prayer. For this end he resolved to compose a book in which should be given suitable instructions for practising this sacred exercise, and for combating courageously with the vicious movements of our corrupt nature, and this with such order and clearness, that not only persons of cultivated understanding might derive instruction from it, but also persons of inferior education. Besides this, as there are various degrees among spiritual persons, some being more advanced than others in the way of perfection, he thought that his book ought to be adapted to beginners, to proficients, and to the perfect; so that there would be none who might not derive light from it, according to his capacity. Accordingly, while he was entertaining the design of this great work, he asked the great Father of Lights, with especial earnestness in prayer, to illuminate his understanding and guide his pen, in order that his writings might serve for light to all classes of persons; to enable them to walk in the arduous path of perfection. One day while he was urging these entreaties with greater fervour than usual, he received from God a signal favour, by which he felt himself still more

animated, and, so to speak, driven to begin the work. What this favour was, is related by Giovanni Chiericato, Provost of the title of the Most Holy Trinity of Padua, and vicar-general of the Most Eminent Barbarigo, bishop of the same city, in his compendium of the Life of this servant of God, in the words which I shall here transcribe:

"Father Santi was engaged in prayer, imploring the Lord to grant him His holy light, that these works which he designed to compose might be profitable to souls, when seized with a rapture he saw in the air a wreath of gold of an oval form, so resplendant that it surpassed the light of the sun; in this was placed a large and beautiful Cross of equal brilliance, and on each side of the wreath were written these words, 'Cedat Deo, Cedat Deo;' and all around he saw many little crosses of the form of the letter T. Within this wreath stood a venerable prelate clothed in a sacerdotal vestment, with a book in his hand, who was giving his benediction. This vision lasted a considerable time, and by it Father Santi felt himself internally instructed to write his book on the Combats, from which the faithful were to derive a very high degree of interior light to guide them in the way of perfection." The meaning of this mysterious vision was, on the prayers of the same father, who was desirous of knowing it, revealed to him, and is recorded by the author in his notice to the reader in the following words: "Father Santi prayed our Lord to make him know the meaning of this vision, and heard it said interiorly, that the

splendour of the wreath signified the light of his book on Spiritual Combats, founded entirely on the Gospel of Jesus Christ; the Cross denoted the mortification, to which he must submit, who desires to advance in the spiritual life, as it is absolutely necessary to place ourselves on the cross, which however was broken, and remained merely in the shape of a T, to show that mortifications resolve themselves into consolations, as soon as the perfect love of God begins to be enjoyed, conformably to what is written, 'Jugum meum suave est.' The words 'Cedat Deo' denoted that every other book should give place to this, which teaches the true practice of the doctrines of Christ and of the holy Gospel. The prelate within the circle signified that this doctrine ought to be taught by an ecclesiastic and a pastor of souls." Thus far this author.

His resolution being strengthened by this vision, he composed the useful book on Spiritual Combats, in which he wrote only what he had gathered from the holy Fathers, and from the sacred doctors, and especially from the angelic Doctor St. Thomas, and the seraphic St. Buonaventura, and the eloquent St. Bernard, the best masters of mystical theology. Moreover, what he wrote, he had not only practised in years past in the spiritual conferences with many of the most distinguished brethren of the Oratory, but had experienced in himself by the exercise of vigorous mortifications, by means of which and his fervent prayers he had arrived at a close union with God, and at a very high

degree of understanding in the interior spiritual life, of which he had become a most prudent master. Moreover, this union with God increased after the vision which has been related; for while it lasted the servant of God experienced an unspeakable sweetness and spiritual consolation, and after it was ended, there remained with him so lively an impression of spiritual feelings and devotion towards God, that he lived, as it were, in ecstacy, and all absorbed in his beloved Lord.

The book on Spiritual Combats was therefore, as we may piously consider, not so much the offspring of his own understanding, as a work compiled under the particular influence of the Spirit of the Lord, and with a special light received as a gift from the Divine Majesty. And in truth the great fruit which has been derived from it by those who have well studied it, and have practised the exercises contained in it, shows what it is. Moreover, as he had in the same book of Spiritual Combats given a certain form and useful and steady method for the regulation of the exercises in the Oratory of St. Jerome, so greatly was the number of brethren increased, and still more, so exemplary and virtuous was the tenor of their lives, that to behold them gave the greatest edification, and excited all to give thanks to the Most High. Amongst the most conspicuous for birth as well as for merit, were two canons of the cathedral, both noble Venetians, one of the house of Cocco, and the other of the house of Molino.

The great city of Padua appeared too narrow a field for the ardent charity of Father Antonio, who seeing the great profit derived by those who frequented the Oratory of St. Jerome, thanks to the fruit which they reaped from his labours, entertained the thought of spreading the flame and extending the same Oratory in other places of the diocese. For this purpose, he asked permission of Monsignor Marco Cornaro to go through the towns and villages, to kindle in them by his ardent words the bright flame of the love of God. Nor had he any difficulty in obtaining leave; for the bishop knowing well what force God gave to his words, to rouse sinners from the lethargy of sin and to implant in their hearts the holy fear of God, with more than good will granted him the permission he desired. Hardly were his fervent discourses heard in the neighbouring towns, when immediately there appeared numbers of penitent sinners, who ran to the feet of the confessor to be released from the chains of the sins with which they were bound. The greater part of them flocked to him, desiring that he who had given rise to their conversion should complete the work; and he with the greatest charity received all, devoting to this sacred function all the time that remained after his preaching. The change, which was observed in the places where he preached, was without doubt marvellous; for the games and balls, which were carried on with the greatest abuse on feast days, were, so to say, banished from among them. Maledictions and blasphemies were no longer heard;

each one laid aside the arms which he was accustomed to carry, and which often gave rise to many quarrels, and caused the hands of Catholics to be stained with the blood of their neighbours; and many turning their backs upon the vanities of the world, cut off the long hair which, according to the custom of those times, they allowed to grow to excess, and cultivated with great care and loss of time. It is impossible to describe the ardour with which Father Santi insisted that this pernicious vanity should be cut off; since he knew well that the hair is oftentimes the snare of the devil, with which souls are bound and made the butt of his darts, a worse evil than the same hair brought upon Absalom, when it exposed him to the blows of Joab.

The spirit of the zealous priest was filled with joy, when he saw that his hearers cut off this useless or rather pernicious superabundance of hair; because it was an indication, that those who acted thus generously would have courage to persevere in the spiritual life, which they were undertaking. But it seemed to him, that he had done but little by withdrawing their minds from sins and defects, if they did not at the same time embrace virtue, and enter upon the life of the new and perfect Christian. For this end he introduced, as the most efficacious means, the frequenting of the Sacraments, the desire of which had hitherto been so rare, that the greater number of seculars contented themselves with receiving them two or three times a year. He exhorted all, not only to betake themselves to church,

but to employ themselves properly while there; and that they might not lose the time in idleness or in talking, but pay to God due honour and worship, he established the custom in the villages, where there were many persons who knew how to read, of singing the Office of the Queen of Paradise, the people being divided into choirs, that the melody offered to God and His most holy Mother might be better ordered; and in places, where there were few who knew how to read, he established the practice of reciting the rosary also in choirs. When this was done, the devout faithful occupied themselves in the exercises of the Spiritual Combats composed by him, by which they were not a little enlightened, by meditating on the eternal truths which they contain. Hence the good priest did not cease to exhort the faithful in every place to which he went, to embrace these exercises, and persuaded the curates of parishes, who ought to watch over the salvation of their flock with the greatest diligence, to introduce into their churches the Oratory, after the model of that of St. Jerome in Padua, from which such fruit had been reaped. So powerful were his words, and so effectual his persuasions, that many Oratories were founded in the diocese of Padua to the great profit of souls.

It was not without bitterness of heart that Father Santi observed in these his meritorious excursions, that in many towns and villages, and even in the city of Padua itself, the holy custom of teaching the Christian doctrine was

so greatly neglected, that adults were not only ashamed to learn, but also to teach others the all-important rudiments of the Catholic religion; and what was more deplorable, the curates themselves, to whom by their office it belongs, blushed to exercise this apostolic ministry. The origin of this abuse was the absence of the bishop from his diocese, as he had been for some time staying in Rome.

So important to a Catholic flock is the presence of its own pastor, that in consequence of no very long absence of this bishop from his diocese, the order of things was so perverted, that the curates esteemed as an indignity, that which ought to be their glory, it being their proper office to teach others the eternal truths and sublime mysteries of our most holy religion. When F. Antonio observed this grave disorder, his heart was inflamed with a zeal, which, so to say, broke forth from his lips in words so ardent, that not only were the hearts of the curates stirred up to resume the intermitted duty; but besides this, he moved those who belonged to the Oratories he had founded, to be their allies in this most noble service. Hence this work was seen in a short time so happily prospering, as well in the number of the brethren as in their fervour, that when the fame of it reached the neighbouring towns, the pastors of these entreated F. Santi to establish his Oratories there, for the especial end of advancing the necessary and fruitful work of teaching the Christian Doctrine.

Among these particularly, the bishops of Vi-

cenza and Treviso in the warmest terms made the same request, with which F. Santi complied, and having visited their dioceses, planted his Oratories in many towns and large villages as well as in the city of Treviso itself. Nor were the expectations of these zealous pastors disappointed; for in a short time, they saw not only the schools of Christian doctrine increased and filled with zeal, but also the brethren of the same become most exemplary and patterns of Christian perfection.

In truth so abundant were the blessings of heaven, which were showered upon those who frequented the Oratories founded by the servant of God, as to cause the greatest astonishment; for although many of them were of low condition, and of rude understanding, and altogether simple people, nevertheless they received such light in heavenly matters, as to render them capable of applying themselves to the holy exercise of prayer. From this it followed that meditating well upon eternal truths, they entered upon a most exemplary course of life, manifesting in all their dealing the strictest honesty, and so great sincerity in their conversation, as to fill with admiration those who had to do with them.

Among them were some who deserve an especial mention in this place, that the fruit which Father Santi so abundantly reaped from his toils, may be more clearly known. A countryman, called Agnolino Paccagnella, a brother, and also director of the Oratory in the town of Altichiera, was a man of the greatest

humility, and had arrived at so high a degree of prayer, that not only when he was engaged in that holy exercise did he enjoy that peace and those heavenly consolations, which God gives to his servants who faithfully serve him; but even when he was engaged in external works he remained, as it were, always absorbed in God. Nor is this to be wondered at, since in his heart he fostered no other love than that of God, and in his mind he allowed no thought to take root but what was spiritual and heavenly, having arrived at the uninterrupted presence of God. Thus, as God said to Abraham, "Ambula coram me, et esto perfectus," this good countryman, always walking in the presence of his Lord, led a most innocent life, and was esteemed by Father Santi, who was his father and guide, as a great servant of God. Hence, knowing him to be so intelligent in spiritual matters, he recommended him to practise that part of the Spiritual Combats which he had composed for the more perfect. The same graces were enjoyed by another, named Luca Grassi, in the town of Guattera, who quitted this life, leaving a reputation of more than ordinary goodness.

In Padua, Giacomo Santalena, also a brother of the Oratory, amidst the defilement of the world learned how to keep unharmed the fair lily of virginal purity, and to observe the most perfect custody of his senses, which he always kept most rigorously mortified. His occupation was that of making wooden shoes; and while he was

at work his mind was so perfectly raised to God, that he did not see who passed before him.

The last instance I shall give is Guglielmo Normandia, a silk mercer, who gave the following clear proof of his exalted virtue. One night his shop having been broken open by thieves, the greater part of his stock was carried away, the theft amounting to no less than four thousand scudi. But those who stole his goods could not deprive him of his peace of mind, or his composure of countenance; for although this loss was so considerable, he gave not the least sign of discomposure, but was often heard to bless and thank the Lord, who had so brought it to pass that this outrage should not interrupt the exercises of the Oratory which he frequented. So exemplary a resignation to the Divine pleasure merited a reward even in this life; for God, having proved by this adversity of what stamp was the virtue and patience of his servant, brought it to pass, that one of the thieves should fall into the hands of justice, and reveal where the goods were concealed, viz. behind the church of St. Justina within some large windows. Thus the good and virtuous tradesman recovered what he had lost, and by this momentary deprivation gained eternal advantages, thanks to his resignation to the Will of God.

But the Oratories instituted by Father Santi benefited not only the souls of the brethren, but their temporal interests also; for God, in order to show how acceptable to him the work was, by his Almighty Arm often delivered from dangers and

even preserved from impending death those who frequented it. In Vigo d' Arzere one of them had the misfortune to fall into the river, and while he was under water and nearly suffocated, not being able to open his lips, at a seasonable moment mentally invoked St. Jerome, the Protector of the Oratory, and immediately experienced his aid; for, without knowing how, to his great astonishment he found himself on the opposite bank of the river entirely out of danger, while he was almost at the point of death.

Another inhabitant of the same place was not only overthrown in the stream, but kept under water by the weight of a heavy load of faggots; when through the same powerful invocation he escaped uninjured from this double danger. He was driving a cart loaded with faggots, when he was unfortunately upset in the Tergola, a small but deep stream, and over him fell the cart also; so that every one thought him already dead, whether suffocated in the water or crushed by the cart. And so in fact it would certainly have been, had he not been aided by an unseen power. In this imminent danger, it most seasonably occurred to him, to invoke the Divine help through the merits of St. Jerome and the good work of the holy Oratory erected under his special patronage; when immediately he felt himself so far released from the load of faggots as to be able to raise his face above the water, and to allow him to breathe freely, which before he could not do; so that he must certainly have died, choked by the waters and buried

under this weight. Meanwhile the bystanders, although they thought he must be already dead, nevertheless compassionately hastened to give him aid, in case he should be capable of it, and began with eagerness to take off the faggots, when to their great surprise he was found safe and sound, for which mercy he praised and thanked God.

Bartolomeo Moreschi, one of the most exemplary brothers of the Oratory, also escaped from a great and imminent danger, being preserved by Divine Providence in the following strange and marvellous manner. On the 27th of May, A.D. 1617, the gunpowder in the public store of ammunition took fire, in the place where it was kept, near to the convent of St. Antonio. On the morning of the same day, Bartolomeo was walking towards some mills, contiguous to the place where the gunpowder was kept, to see whether some corn of his was ground, and was already near the place, where he would certainly have lost his life, when he met a person who not only persuaded him, but forcibly obliged him to turn back with all haste. Thus retracing his steps, he had not yet left the meadow of the valley, when this memorable explosion took place, which was so great as to deserve to be recorded in the History of Padua. Such was the shock, that many houses, as well as the before-mentioned mills, were overthrown, and many persons perished, among whom would have been Bartolomeo, had he not happily been entreated by this man to turn back.

Father Santi himself recorded this happy event, and moreover remarked, in order to show how much God is pleased with diligence and punctuality in prayer at the appointed hours, that when through the same explosion the whole dormitory of the nuns of Santa Maria of Bethelemme was destroyed and burned; nevertheless the church and choir remained uninjured, where they were assembled to praise their Divine Spouse; so that not one of them perished or was even injured by this destructive calamity.

Lastly, many of the same brethren, having fallen from trees of considerable height, escaped unharmed through the invocation of St. Jerome their protector; and others again, though overrun by the wheels of very heavy waggons, received no injury.

Good works are often the object of scorn and derision to the wicked; thus this holy undertaking of the Oratories founded by Father Santi met with some who scoffed at it. But God, who preserved many of the brothers from dangers, to show how pleasing to Him were these Oratories, as has been just related, for the clearer proof of the same, permitted that those who mocked should be seized with unexpected misfortunes; for some such persons, while sneering at this holy work in the town of Altichiera, fell from trees of a great height and were severely injured. In the city of Padua, in like manner, a young woman was once jesting at the Oratory founded in the parish church of St. Fermo, a thing not to be wondered at, as it was directly opposed to

her inclinations, she being greatly devoted to those vanities, which were strongly resisted by this virtuous confraternity; but she soon paid the penalty of her daring jests, being attacked by the devil, who for a long time tormented her. Again, in the town of Rubano there was a woman, who in punishment of her contempt, was afflicted with a grievous infirmity, which brought her to the point of death, but who, in her repentance, found an effectual remedy for this otherwise mortal disease; for having acknowledged her fault, while she was in this dangerous state, and detesting it with all her heart, she obtained the reward of recovered health.

But not only did those who jeered at the Oratories meet with such disasters, but those, who were called by the internal inspirations of God to enroll themselves among the members and resisted the powerful invitation, were in like manner punished with sudden misfortunes. Father Santi happened one day to preach in the Church of the Battaglia, a large district near Monselice, to a most numerous audience, and exhorted them to embrace the exercises of the Oratory, that by this means they might preserve themselves far from sin and in the grace of God. Among his hearers was a young man named Francesco Cavarzerano, to whom the words of the servant of God sounded like thunder, not only resounding in his ears, but penetrating to his heart; to which were added his own internal impulses, urging him not a little to add his name to the list of this devout company. He had how-

ever allowed his hair to grow to a great length, and was filled with horror at the thought of cutting it off; and as he must needs lay aside these tokens of vanity, if he wished to be admitted to the Oratory, with a heart full of obstinacy he resisted the Divine inspirations, and probably to avoid feeling still stronger impulses, rushed out of the church. But it was only to meet the punishment he deserved; for falling into a quarrel with another young man of the same place, and passing from words to blows, he was severely wounded by a pistol-shot. This ball was, so to say, a ball of fire, which made him return to himself and recover his right judgment, acknowledging at the same time his fault and the just punishment he had received for it; for as soon as he received this blow, he cried out with a loud voice, begging that he might have a confessor, to absolve him from his sins. Hearing the tumult and the cries of the wounded man, Father Santi hastened to give him succour in his necessity, whereupon he confessed publicly that this misfortune had befallen him, in punishment of the resistance he had offered to the Divine inspirations, by which he had been invited to enter himself as a brother of the Oratory; and added, that the punishment corresponded well with the fault, as he had received a wound on the head, to the great injury of his too dearly-prized hair, in order to avoid the loss of which, he had refused to yield himself to these exhortations, and had obstinately resisted the Divine call.

How greatly these and the like events, pros-

perous to those who embraced the exercises of the Oratory, and most calamitous to those who despised them, accredited and promoted the work of Father Santi, every one will easily believe. Thus, while the protection which God extended to them became more clear than the mid-day light, they increased so greatly in esteem and veneration, that women began to ask to be admitted. It appeared to the servant of God, who was no less devout than prudent, that they ought not to be excluded. Nevertheless, with great sagacity, lest the devil should find an opportunity to sow cockle among the wheat, he so arranged that they should assemble in churches different from those destined for the men; and there under the direction of pious and devout matrons, after having employed themselves in teaching the Christian doctrine to poor ignorant young girls, they should assemble and recite in choirs the most holy rosary, and then apply themselves for half an hour to meditate on heavenly things. Thus they were sufficiently prepared by devout instructions to maintain themselves in the holy fear of God, and to know and despise the vanities of the world. In this manner not only in the city of Padua, but also in many towns and villages of the diocese, there were founded many Oratories for women on this excellent system, in order that they might not be excluded from the spiritual benefits which the men derived from them.

CHAPTER III.

FATHER DE SANTI FOUNDS THE CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY IN THE CHURCH OF ST. THOMAS THE MARTYR IN PADUA.

GREAT was the delight of Father Antonio Maria on beholding the fruit which by means of his labours, strengthened by Divine grace, was gathered from these Oratories, and particularly from that of St. Jerome of Padua. Nevertheless he was not perfectly satisfied, inasmuch as he was desirous, that the spiritual advantages thus gained should be perpetuated. Accordingly with this view he began to train certain priests, his penitents, according to his own spirit; not so much that they might render him present assistance, as that they might be qualified to succeed him in the spiritual culture of the Oratory after his death.

It was about this time that a rumour of the approaching canonization of St. Philip Neri, the Founder of the Congregation of the Oratory in Rome, reached Padua, and became the subject of general conversation. Not only Italy but the whole Catholic world, so to speak, was filled with his praises, and extolled the virtue of the Saint and the benefits of his Institute. Father Antonio, hearing of the wonderful reformation which he had been the means of effecting in Rome, by establishing daily preaching and the

practice of mental prayer, as well as the more frequent administration of the sacraments of Penance and the Eucharist, at once entertained the wish to form an institute on the same model in his own city, that the fruits of his Oratory might be preserved in perpetuity. As however the account which he had heard, of the nature and rules of the Congregation of Rome was not sufficiently distinct, he deemed it best to go himself to Rome to see the Institute in actual operation, and to learn the constitutions on the spot. This design was highly approved by Mgr. Marco Cornaro his bishop, and some canons of the cathedral, his penitents, with whom he conferred on the subject; and accordingly he set out on the second of June, A.D. 1620. When he had reached Rome, and paid his devotions at the great basilicas of the city, he at once devoted himself to the great object he had in view, viz. to study and make himself thoroughly acquainted with the system adopted by the Fathers of the Oratory.

In the Congregation Father de Santi had the good fortune to meet with an old friend, who had been his fellow student in the University of Padua many years before. This was Father Oderico Rinaldi, well known for his labours in continuing the Annals of Baronius. He welcomed him with the warmest affection, and most highly approved of his design; as it seemed to him especially calculated to do good in the city of Padua, where so many young men are brought together for the studies of that famous University.

He had also the advantage of an introduction to Father Pietro Consolini, one of the companions and most intimate friends of the Saint, who was perhaps better acquainted than any other with the secret gifts and graces which God had bestowed upon him. Antonio, to whom this circumstance was known, deservedly esteemed it one of the greatest favours of God, that he had the opportunity of conferring with him on the subject he had so much at heart. Accordingly he paid him a visit, and explained to him the project he entertained of establishing the congregation in Padua; and moreover related to him the training he had had from his early director, the curate of St. Agnes, in public mortifications, like those with which St. Philip was accustomed to discipline his spiritual children; and told him how it had been his aim to bring up in the same school those who frequented the Oratory of St. Jerome. Father Consolini was too sincere a lover of the virtue of mortification not to be greatly delighted with what he heard. He was satisfied that Father de Santi was worthy to undertake the great work he contemplated, and felt convinced that the success of the Oratory of Padua, founded on so solid a basis, would continue and increase. The common love of these fathers for this admirable virtue gave rise to an instant friendship between them; and the venerable friend of St. Philip, drawing the head of Father Santi to his breast, while tears of joy streamed from his eyes, and his heart burned within him, said to him, "My son, my son, may you be blessed!

Continue to preserve this spirit in your Oratory; for it was the spirit of the holy Father Philip, to seek contempt, to avoid all applause and praise of this world, to follow Jesus Christ crucified in poverty and nakedness, amidst contempt and derision, and to devote himself to the good of souls for the pure love of his Lord."

Father Santi was greatly consoled and strengthened in his resolution by the conversation of these two distinguished men, and applied himself with still greater care and diligence to observe and make himself acquainted with the customs and exercises practised by the sons of St. Philip. For this purpose he spent the whole summer of the year 1620 in Rome; but not liking to leave his spiritual children longer deprived of his care, after obtaining from the Fathers of the Congregation a copy of their rules and observances, and taking an affectionate leave of them, especially of Father Consolini, and Father Rinaldi, he returned to Padua. So greatly had he been edified by the system and practice of the Fathers of the Vallicella, that his desire of establishing a similar institute for the benefit of his fellow-countrymen was still greater than before. For this purpose he again and again asked light and guidance from God, making it the constant subject of his prayers. After this preparation, he had next recourse to his bishop, with whom he had frequent conferences on the best mode of setting on foot and carrying out the design. Mgr. Cornaro, as has been already said, was greatly desirous of seeing the Oratory permanently established in

his diocese, the more so, as he had already many years ago, had a foretaste of benefits to be expected from the Congregation of St. Philip, in the manner which shall now be related.

Twenty-two years before this time, that is to say, so early as the year 1598, the Father Angelo Velli, one of the spiritual children of St. Philip and original Fathers of the Oratory, accompanied the Cardinal Pietro Aldobrandino, nephew of Clement VIII. and Legate of Ferrara, as his confessor. From Ferrara he paid a visit to Padua, and there gave a specimen of the exercises which St. Philip had introduced in Rome. The first who delivered one of the familiar Oratorian discourses was the Abate Marc' Antonio Maffa himself, one of St. Philip's dearest spiritual children. All were highly pleased with these exercises, and especially the Bishop Mgr. Cornaro, of whom we have already spoken, and the Chapter of the Cathedral. Indeed so much were they delighted that they resolved to establish the Institute in the city; and Father Velli, in a letter to F. Antonio Talpa, Superior of the Oratory of Naples, thus speaks of its prospects: "Here in Padua there has been begun an Oratory which gives great promise of continuance, as it has been warmly taken up by the Bishop and the whole Chapter, of which we may say that it is the first Chapter in Italy without exception in point of wealth, and that in it there are many capable of preaching well;" and then adds, "it was begun with great applause in the presence of the most illustrious Cardinal Cusano, with a most excel-

lent discourse by the Abate Maffa." It would seem that the Institute, begun with such promise, continued for some time, as F. Gallonio, in his Life of St. Philip, published in 1600, mentions the Oratory of Padua as the second of those founded after the model of that of Rome. Nevertheless, from some cause which does not appear, the undertaking was interrupted and came to nothing, until it was resumed in the manner here related.

The prudent advice which F. Santi received from his Bishop, when he went to consult him on the means he should adopt, was this, that he should first devote himself to the bringing up of three or four fervent priests according to the spirit of the Congregation of Rome, that they might live in community as soon as he should obtain a fixed dwelling for the congregation; and he announced his own determination to assist him by all the means in his power. He thought it most desirable that he should have a parish church in the city for the church of the Congregation, that the income might be devoted to the maintenance of the Congregation, and promised to give him one on the first vacancy.

Meanwhile, before any further steps were taken, the Patriarch St. Philip was solemnly canonized in the year 1622, and the feast celebrated with the greatest joy throughout the Catholic world. Father Santi took occasion from this, to place all the Oratories, which he had founded or restored, under the patronage of St. Jerome and St. Philip, instead of St. Jerome only, and introduced the

commemoration of these two saints into the office recited by the brethren. Moreover, for his own Oratory of Padua he had a large picture painted of the most holy Virgin with the Divine Infant in her arms, and beneath, these two Saints Jerome and Philip, a design which was afterwards copied in all his Oratories.

Four years elapsed after the return of Father Santi from Rome, before he was able to make any great advances in his contemplated undertaking. In the year 1624, however, the parish of St. Thomas the Martyr became vacant by the death of the Curate, and as the Church was conveniently situated, with abundant space for building, the benefice was immediately conferred by the bishop on F. Santi. According to the bishop's desire however, he submitted to a public examination with twenty-three other candidates, and was unanimously declared the best qualified. He chose three priests as his companions, trained in humility and mortification, the true spirit of the Congregation, D. Vincenzo Erricci, D. Giovanni Pietro Braga, and D. Gaspar Columbina. These his companions he presented to the Bishop, and declaring their wish, begged him to establish the Congregation of the Oratory in the Church of St. Thomas the Martyr. The good prelate received them with the greatest kindness, and joyfully complied with their request, instituting the Congregation by virtue of the authority of the Ordinary, and granting them ample faculties for carrying on the objects of the institution.

Inexpressible was the joy and thankfulness of

Father Santi on beholding his long desired object on the point of being accomplished. He at once removed with his little community to their new abode, and without delay began the exercises of the Oratory, that is to say, not only the meditations and other devotions as before, but the daily sermons, and constant administration on the sacraments of Penance and the holy Eucharist. It still remained however to provide for the perpetuity of the establishment; as on his death, the parish might possibly be conferred upon some one unconnected with the Congregation. To obtain the perpetual union of the parish with the new Congregation, it was necessary to apply to Rome, and was therefore a matter of great difficulty and expense. This difficulty was increased by the death of Mgr. Cornaro in the year 1625, as this prelate, whose love of the Oratory was so great, would doubtless have carried it through, had he lived. After four years however, through the assistance of his friends and spiritual children, he at length obtained the wished-for Bulls, at a time when the plague was ravaging Padua, and the uncertainty of life made him especially desirous of them.

In the meantime the Congregation had increased in numbers, and still more in the estimation of the people of Padua. The good effects were seen daily in frequent attendance on the Sacraments and the improved demeanour of the citizens. Among the Fathers the most distinguished were Father Gio. Battista Polacco of Feltre, Father

Gio. Maria Monterosso of Padua, and the Brother Domenico Menogozzi, who were the pillars which supported the institution. All persevered with the greatest zeal in the works of the institution and in obedience to their founder, and now chosen Superior, Father de' Santi; and as we are told in his life by Giov. Chiericato, vicar of the bishop of Padua, the whole community gave the greatest edification to the city. The old Church of St. Thomas was soon found to be too small for the needs of the Congregation, and Father Santi, though entirely without resources, began to turn his thoughts towards the erection of a new one. His confidence in God, whose honour he sought, did not fail him, and persevering in his undertaking, he at last completed it, and the new Church was blessed and opened in the year 1640, by the Bishop of Forcello, the Vicar capitular of Padua. But before the completion of this great work the new Congregation had a proof of the paternal care of St. Philip on their behalf, which happened in the following manner. After the papal bulls for the confirmation of the institute and its union with the parish of St. Thomas had been obtained from Rome, as the Church of Padua was then without a Bishop, they were entrusted to the neighbouring Bishop of Vicenza, to be executed. By him they were handed over to his vicar-general, by whom the necessary forms were gone through; but unhappily in the confusion and neglect of business occasioned by the plague, it was forgotten in whose hands these precious documents had been deposited. It may be easily

imagined how sadly afflicted the Fathers were at this loss; nevertheless they did not despair, but had recourse with ardent prayers to the Saint for assistance in their need. Nor were they disappointed in their hope; for the holy Father, by the miraculous sweat of his picture, preserved in the Sacristy of their Church, so moved the hearts of those who concealed the documents, that they at once restored them to the Fathers.

An account of this miracle was written by Mgr. Tomasini, Bishop of Cittanova, and is given in Latin in the Acts of the Bollandists. vid. May 26.

CHAPTER IV.

AFTER HAVING ESTABLISHED THE CONGREGATION OF THE ORATORY IN PADUA, FATHER CORTIVO VISITS MANY OTHER CITIES WITH THE GREATEST SUCCESS. —HE THEN RETURNS TO HIS OWN COUNTRY, AND THERE EMPLOYS HIMSELF IN EXERCISES PROPER TO HIS INSTITUTE UNTIL HIS HOLY DEATH.

When the House was well provided with subjects who performed faithfully the duties of Evangelical labourers, and the virtuous company had become no less serviceable by their labours than by their example, the charitable heart of Father Antonio would not suffer him to leave neglected the various Oratories of men and women which he had already founded, and accordingly he hastened to visit not only the diocese of Padua, but those of Vicenza, Trivigi, and Feltre, in order

to increase the fervour of his children by his presence. He visited the Oratories which he had set up in the above-named dioceses, and everywhere seemed to carry with him flames of holy love, with which he not only kindled new zeal in the hearts of the former members, but also inflamed those of many more, who sought to join them. Moreover, he melted the frozen hearts of many obstinate sinners, whom he converted by his fervent addresses. But especially did he make frequent visits in the diocese of Padua, supported by the authority of Cardinal Valiero, the new Bishop, who knowing well how zealous a labourer he was, deemed that Providence had provided him with a faithful coadjutor to help him to bear the heavy burden of the episcopacy, and often urgently persuaded him to make these circuits throughout his diocese, feeling confident that, through his fervent and apostolical exhortations, it would become fruitful in virtuous actions.

While Father Santi was employed in these holy and heroic deeds, the city of Padua was in the year 1631 visited with the plague, which caused the greatest destruction of the inhabitants. At this time he had been invited to Feltre, as well to visit the Oratory there, as because some ecclesiastics of good reputation, who entertained the thought of planting in their own country the Congregation of the Oratory, as already founded in Rome by S. Philip, had entreated him for this purpose to visit their city. There he remained that year, the city having been preserved from the

disease by the intercession of the Virgin Mother, and the other Saints its protectors. Great was the harvest which the servant of God reaped in this district in the course of this year, as well as in the city of Bell'uno and the neighbouring towns, and in Frivoli, which he visited in succession, in all these places waging war against vanity, and that with such success, that in many places the vain and luxurious were constrained by a sweet interior force to yield and lay aside every luxurious habit, and cut off their long hair. He pacified the most inveterate enmities, removed many abuses of balls and worldly pastimes, reconciled innumerable sinners to God, and lastly, by his powerful exhortations, planted in the hearts of many a serious and effectual care for their own eternal salvation, and steady resolutions to observe faithfully the Divine commands.

In the meantime, the Divine Mercy having consoled the city of Padua by, so to say, sheathing the blood-stained sword of justice, the pestilence with which it had been afflicted having ceased, Father Santi returned to his country laden with spoil snatched from hell. He did not however return for repose, or to allow himself leisure ; as besides the labours he underwent in bringing up and regulating the infant Congregation which he had founded, he was also obliged to take upon himself the burden of many others. Mgr. Marc' Antonio Cornaro, who had been raised to the see of Padua on the death of Cardinal Valiero, observing that, in consequence of the plague, the work of teaching the Christian doctrine had

been not a little slackened throughout the diocese, knew not to whom he could have recourse better than to the servant of God, in order to rekindle the almost extinguished zeal of those who were employed in this great work. Nor was he in the least disappointed in his expectation; for Father Santi, willingly undertaking the heavy charge, travelled like lightning through the diocese, and in a short time by his Apostolical zeal thoroughly restored the work of teaching the Christian doctrine, and revived the original fervour of the brethren of his Oratories.

But a new harvest offered itself to this unwearied labourer, which he was to reap by means of his Apostolical labours. A long time had now elapsed since his spiritual works had become known in Roverè of Trent; and many devout persons having perceived what great fruit might be derived from them, had set themselves to practise the exercises which he taught. Deeming however that a greater harvest of good would be gathered in, if the living voice of the author should explain to them these heavenly doctrines, many of the principal persons of the place, as well seculars as ecclesiastics, with warm entreaties requested him to visit their country, that by his fervour he might effectually promote the glory of God and the salvation of his neighbour, and sent a priest of Roverè, of great piety, named Biagio Maffei, expressly to invite and conduct him.

The Congregation of Padua was now sufficiently settled both in spiritual and temporal

matters, to allow him to think, that his absence would not be prejudicial to it; so that not having the heart to refuse his service and toil to those who desired it for their spiritual advancement, he asked and obtained leave of absence from the Fathers on the 26th of August, 1641; and set out from Padua accompanied by Giov. Maria Baldini, a lay-brother of his Congregation, and the priest already mentioned. Having arrived safely at Roverè on the evening of the 30th of the same month, without allowing himself any interval of repose, he immediately began to undertake his accustomed labours of preaching and hearing confessions with untiring zeal. The harvest corresponded with the labour he bestowed upon it, many men and still more women being so touched as to lay aside all vain pomp and worldly ornaments, and to embrace a Christian life according to the instructions contained in his book of the Combats. He founded two Oratories, one for men and the other for women, in different Churches, and gave them many prudent instructions and useful hints for their spiritual progress. While at this place, it happened that he had to confess the Countess Sibilla di Lodron, a lady, who to the distinction of the most noble birth, added the true splendour which piety and devotion give. As the words of the servant of God were so efficacious with sinners, it may easily be supposed, how much greater weight they would have on the soul of this lady so well disposed. Hence it was, that through his persuasions she undertook the erection of a Monastery

of Sacred Virgins in Roverè, on which, with a devout liberality, she expended forty thousand florins. But it seemed to her but little to have furnished this sum to construct this garden of delights for the Divine Spouse, and accordingly she determined to consecrate herself also to Him, in this sacred spot. This design she executed with such humility as to give edification even in distant places, wherever the report of it was spread; for she betook herself to the monastery with a cord round her neck, and prostrating herself at the feet of the Mothers, humbly begged them to accept her, as a poor servant in the sacred house of which she had been the foundress. Her entreaties were more than willingly accepted; and having been admitted into the community, she there lived and died such a pattern of virtue and devotion, as to leave behind her a deservedly honoured reputation for great and truly Christian virtues.

Also while at Roverè, Father Santi conversed with the servant of God Bernadina Maffeotta to the mutual consolation of both. She was a woman of great virtue, who had attained a very high degree of union with God; her heart was inflamed with a holy love, which, so to say, broke forth the more ardently, whenever she was about to receive her Divine Spouse in the Sacrament. At such times she was unable to keep it concealed; so that it would break out in the most ardent affections, which kindled in the hearts of the bystanders flames of holy love and tender devotion towards their Lord. These effects

were experienced by Father Santi himself, when he administered to her the Eucharistic Food.

The servant of God made but a short stay at Roverè, quitting it after sixteen days; but abundant was the fruit he gathered, as that devout people corresponded zealously with the labour he bestowed upon them. But beyond comparison greater was the good he effected in Verona, whither he betook himself on quitting Roverè. The Bishop of this Church was Mgr. Marco Giustiniani, a prelate of great virtue and zeal; and his vicar-general was Marc' Antonio Zaniboni, formerly Curate of St. Juliana in Padua, who, on the death of Marco Manzoni the Curate of St. Agnes, where the Oratory used to be held, granted his Church of St. Juliana for this purpose, as it was then without any fixed place of meeting. From this circumstance the virtues and talents of Father Santi were well known to him, and when he arrived in Verona he lost no time in acquainting the Bishop with his visit. He sent for him, desiring to see and converse with him, and so captivated was he with his humility and the charms of his conversation, that with a gentle violence he obliged him to make some stay in his city, that it also might be enlightened by his doctrine, and rendered fervent by the flames of his charity. He accepted the courteous invitation of this zealous pastor, which was so conformable with his own aim, viz. the glory of God and the salvation of souls. Accordingly he preached with his accustomed energy to the people almost every day, in the Church

of St. Benedict, and chose for the subject of his discourses these words, "Nolo mortem peccatoris, sed magis ut convertatur et vivat," "I desire not the death of the sinner, but rather that he be converted and live;" upon which he reasoned for a whole month, always speaking of the infinite goodness of the Lord towards sinners, without ever during so long a time being at a loss for new thoughts or abundance of words, to discourse on so exalted a subject. So great indeed was his eloquence and such the force of his arguments, that every word of his seemed a dart, penetrating the hearts of his hearers; so that, in consequence, innumerable sinners were converted to God, and resolved to give themselves in all things and for ever to His service. But the greater was the sensation produced by his sermons, so much the greater became his labours; for all vied with one another in running to his feet, not only to be released from the heavy chains of their sins by sacramental Absolution, but also to receive from his lips wholesome instructions for the regulation of their lives. Thus all the time which remained after preaching, and the refreshment necessary to support life, was entirely taken up, night as well as day, in hearing the confessions of those who flocked to him, and in giving them the maxims of eternal life.

Besides the sermon which he delivered every day to the people in the church of St. Benedict, in the evening he made a discourse in the men's Oratory, where also he held the spiritual confer-

ences, according to the plan laid down in his book on the Spiritual Combats, by means of which he effected the reformation both of the ecclesiastics and seculars, who assembled there. And lastly, in order that persons of all states might have the benefit of his knowledge and his labours, he preached also to the nuns with the same happy success. Adapting his fervent discourses to the state of life which they had embraced, he exhorted them to avoid conversation with seculars, as pernicious to those who are entirely consecrated to their Heavenly Spouse. He also instructed them in the all-important virtue of obedience, and in the observance of their other vows; and above all stimulated them to embrace the holy exercise of mental prayer, teaching them the method of practising it with advantage. And as they heard him willingly and were well disposed, they readily undertook all that he recommended. These long and uninterrupted occupations served to increase still more and to refine the ardent love of Father Santi, insomuch that his heart seemed to have become a living flame, and his breast a glowing furnace, through the new ardour he had conceived by means of these Apostolical ministrations. Indeed it might almost have been expected, that he would be wholly consumed by his zeal; and he himself said, that he doubted, lest when he left Verona his breast would open and his heart take flight. Moreover, it was manifest to all, that during the last days of his stay in the city, from the force of the fire which burned within him, his eyes were suffused with

abundant tears, and his breast heaved with frequent sighs; so that when he began to reason on the love of God, and the excellence of a soul adorned with charity, he was unable to proceed; and his words were obliged to give place to the floods which streamed from his eyes. Never however was he felt to be more persuasive than at that time; so that it is no wonder, that the city of Verona was a changed place. From this time, the lips of all repeated no other maxims but those recorded in his book of the Combats; and the holy fear of God was so deeply rooted in the hearts of these citizens, that they would willingly have lost their lives rather than offend their Lord. The schools of Christian doctrine also, by means of his exhortations, had made such progress, that both men and women were eager to employ themselves in this great work, men teaching men, and women teaching women, the rudiments of our faith. Hence it is impossible to describe the consolation and the joy felt by the good Bishop Giustiniani on beholding with his own eyes the immense profit which his flock had derived from the sojourn of the servant of God in his city.

The author Chiericato, in his abstract of his Life, records the great fruit which he reaped from his labours in these words: "He left in the minds of all the highest sentiments of the service of the Lord, and Verona had become, as it were, one single Oratory, the maxims of Father Santi's Spiritual Combats being on the lips of all, as well the nobles as the people, together with

the desire to love God and the resolution to abstain from sin, and to die sooner than offend the Divine Majesty. The schools of Christian doctrine throughout the city yielded abundant advantages, owing to the number of labourers who frequented them, both men and women, to the great consolation of the prelate, the advantage of the young, and the edification of the whole city."

While Father Santi was at Verona, certain exemplary priests, who entertained the notion of introducing into their city the Congregation of the Oratory, which they knew to be thriving so well in Padua, had recourse to him as its Founder, for counsel and assistance. He listened to their request with the greatest kindness, and did not fail to offer his assistance in an undertaking, which he esteemed so highly, and had found so profitable in Padua.

He gave them the necessary instructions, and besides, conversed seriously about it with the Bishop, with whom his recommendations were so effectual, that after much consideration it was resolved to set up the new Congregation in the parish church of St. Benedict, the Curate of which was Lorenzo Romanelli, a priest of great virtue, and eagerly desirous of seeing this new ornament added to the city of Verona. It was his intention, in imitation of what had been done in Padua, to unite the revenues of the parish with the Congregation in perpetuity; but death interfered with his design and broke up the infant Congregation. Before the Bulls for the

union could be obtained from Rome, both Mgr. Giustiniani and the priest Romanelli had passed to another life, and from want of the necessary means, the Congregation was obliged to disperse. Meanwhile thirty-four days had passed since Father Santi arrived at Verona, and as he had not only reaped an abundant harvest, as has been already mentioned, but, by restoring and planting many Oratories, had probably rendered permanent the fruits of his holy labours, he determined to return to his country. It is impossible to describe the mutual tenderness of the people and the servant of God which manifested itself on his departure. Tears streamed in profusion from the eyes of the people of Verona, on witnessing the departure of Father Santi, who had laboured so zealously for their spiritual good; and on the other hand, his heart was melted at the prospect of withdrawing himself from a city so devout, and one which had so well corresponded with his preaching and exhortations. In fact it seemed to be a renewal of that touching and sad spectacle which was witnessed in Miletus, when the Apostle of the Gentiles, being on the point of quitting that city, had to separate himself from so many spiritual children, whom by means of his apostolical preaching he had regenerated to Christ; for as they attended the Apostle to his ship, so a great number of the citizens of Verona, not knowing how to tear themselves from their beloved Father, followed him for a long distance on the road weeping all the way. Moreover, as the people of Miletus were afflicted

to excess, because they were never to behold the Apostle again; so were they to be for ever deprived of the consolation of seeing Father Santi, as after his return to Padua he ceased to visit other dioceses, and remained stationary in that city. And if he had rendered himself glorious by his apostolical fatigues endured in the many journeys and missions he undertook, it may justly be thought that he rendered himself far more glorious by abandoning them for the exalted motive he had in so doing, as shall now be related.

Although, as has been already observed, the Congregation of Padua was by his efforts sufficiently established, nevertheless his spiritual children seeing him involved in so great and insupportable fatigues, not without reason feared lest they might endanger his life. Moreover, they considered, that his absence on account of these missions, by depriving the rising Congregation of the presence of its own Father and Founder, at the same time deprived it of many advantages, which under his care and direction might reasonably be expected. Accordingly they had recourse for advice, as to an oracle, to the Fathers of the Congregation of Rome, from whom they received this wise reply, that the children of S. Philip ought to be content to remain stationary at their own Church, and there and in their Oratory to labour in the service of the souls there assembled, by means of those holy ministrations instituted by the holy Father; and that accordingly they deemed it expedient for the Congregation,

that the Founder and head should not absent himself from the other members of the body.

When Father Santi returned to Padua, laden with merits and virtuous deeds, he was received by his children with the affection and reverence due to such a father; while at the same time they besought him for the future to be more cautious in undertaking these foreign labours, under which his health would certainly fail, saying that he had in his own country and in his own Congregation an abundant harvest to reap, in cultivating the souls of his own penitents and so many others, who flocked to the exercises. But the motive of his own bodily health would have little influenced the untiring mind of Father Santi, had they not opportunely given him notice of the prudent counsel received from the Fathers of Rome, as already mentioned. On hearing these words, as he was most truly humble, and had no other end in view than to do the Will of God and to serve Him in the manner which should be most pleasing to Him, he readily submitted his own judgment to the will of his children and the Fathers of the Congregation. This resolution was a most clear proof of his heroic virtue; for well knowing, as he did, the fruit he gained for his neighbour by these journeys and missions, no sooner did he hear from his children, that these undertakings, however virtuous, were not proper to his vocation, than immediately, without being in the least disturbed, he not only resolved to discontinue them, but, as Chiericato testifies, had no longer any inclination to undertake simi-

lar works, being content to exercise his talents in the Church of the Congregation and in his own Oratory at Padua. We may therefore safely conclude, that he was thus readily persuaded, because in all his labours he aimed at nothing but the fulfilment of the Divine Will; as he was accustomed to say, that we have need to make many prayers on these two words, "I will," and "I will not," "I will what God wills, and I will not choose my own will." Accordingly being convinced by the advice he received from the Fathers of the Congregation, that God no longer desired by his means the good which he had done in these journeys, he immediately resolved to discontinue all such external employments. When the head was thus permanently united with the body of the Congregation, he applied all his fervour to the culture of souls, as well in the Confessional of his Church, as from the preacher's chair, preaching according to the custom of the Oratory, which he observed most rigorously. It was a common saying of his, "I do not wish to have richly adorned discourses from the chair. He who speaks simply is best understood. He who seeks fine words must not come to the Oratory." Seldom did he go out of the house, unless urged by his charity to go and visit the sick. Of the rest of the time, which was at his disposal, he spent a great part in the exercise of mental prayer, in which he was not a little favoured by God, as was testified by the copious tears which streamed from his eyes, to such a degree, that among the other gifts which he re-

ceived from God may be justly mentioned that of tears. When praying or reasoning on spiritual things, or communicating his penitents, his eyes were like two fountains of tears.

As he frequently occupied himself in the house, his private room seemed to be a public Oratory, from the number of those who had recourse to him, to converse on spiritual subjects. Innumerable were his penitents, among whom were many persons of the highest rank, noblemen as well of Venice as of Padua, who every day betook themselves to his chamber, to receive sacramental Absolution from him, or to hear his spiritual instructions, which were the more effectual as they were delivered with a manner full of sweetness and remarkable gentleness.

It seemed as though his spirit were a perfect copy of that of St. Francis of Sales; since, as the author before-mentioned affirms, he was wholly at the service of all, satisfying the needs of every one with admirable sweetness, and never weary of speaking of God and inflaming souls with His holy love. But not only did he thus place himself at the service of all, but without his quitting Padua, his charity seemed to transplant him everywhere. For he did not so abandon the Oratories, which he had planted in so many distant places, as not to contrive by means of letters to preserve and increase the fervour of spirit already conceived by these brethren. Besides this many of them frequently came to Padua, purposely to pay their respects to their dear Father, to make him acquainted with the

state of the Oratories he had founded, and to receive from him new advice and instructions how to advance in perfection. And lastly, some, who perceived themselves to have become lukewarm, came from a great distance, that they might by seeing him kindle anew their almost extinguished fervour. He received all with kindness and embraced them with the greatest tenderness, and by his ardent charity was the means of inflaming all with greater zeal in the service of God.

Amidst these incessant occupations which engaged him in his own country, the only relaxation he allowed himself was to go sometimes to visit the Oratory, in which the soul of St. Anthony, the Thaumaturgus of Padua, released from the fetters of the body, gloriously took flight to heaven. This sacred place is situated at Codalonga, about half a mile distant from the city of Padua, and is commonly called Sant' Antonino. As he had the honour to bear the name of this great Saint, and was a faithful imitator of his virtues, he had a very great devotion towards him; so that he gladly paid him the tribute of these most affectionate visits, in which he sought the refreshment of his spirit rather than his body; for taking with him many of his spiritual children, not only did he occupy the time they spent in the Oratory in sacred duties, but also on the road, as well going as returning, they did nothing but recite prayers or meditate on some point proposed by him. In this sacred place, among other devotions, it was his wish that they

should sing alternately the hymn "O gloriosa Domina," which had been by inspiration put into the mouth of that great Saint. There he celebrated Mass, and after reading the holy Gospel, he used to turn round and discourse with his usual fervour to the bystanders, relating some miracle performed by the saint, from which he would gather useful and devout reflections, adapted to inflame their hearts more and more with devotion and affection towards the common protector of their city. He would then with his own hand administer the Bread of Angels to his spiritual children, and after he had made his thanksgiving and recited other devotions, they returned to their homes filled with spiritual joy.

For seven successive years did Father Santi continue to labour for the good of souls, in his own vineyard of the Congregation of the Oratory which he had founded, when in the year 1648 it pleased God, who desired that he should be still more enriched with merits, that he should be attacked with severe and afflicting infirmities. He was then seized with stunning pains in the head, and a painful singing in the ears, which caused unspeakable distress; and to this was added a tedious wakefulness, so that being entirely deprived of rest, he could not close his eyes or take any sleep, the loss of which necessary refreshment increased his other sufferings. The physicians were called in; but they were better able to tell the cause of the malady than to find a remedy for it. They unanimously at-

tributed it to his continued contemplations and the elevation of his mind to heavenly things, and to his uninterrupted labours in discoursing and preaching with so great fervour, which had produced a strong tendency of blood to the head. But although the physicians knew not how to prescribe a remedy for his sickness, he knew well how to avail himself of one which is victorious over all evils; this was patience, with which he not only endured but overcame these long and tedious sufferings, which his illness and long want of sleep occasioned him.

The servant of God was not slow to perceive that these infirmities were the forerunners of a not far distant death; but as he had been singularly well exercised during the whole of his life in the resignation of his own will to that of God, even on this occasion he easily submitted to the divine good pleasure, placing himself with filial affection at the disposal of his Lord, ready to live or die, when and as it should please Him, and to support every infirmity with which He should be pleased to try him. Conformably with these resolutions he maintained for the long period of two years, during which his infirmities lasted, the practice of an unfailing patience, and an incomparable conformity with the Will of God. Throughout this long interval he showed himself superior to this infirmity, and not only daily celebrated the Divine Sacrifice in which he found all his delight, but heard the confessions of his numerous penitents, although this laborious duty increased his sufferings. Although

owing to his protracted vigils his body had become incapable of repose, his soul did not cease to find its repose in a loving union with God, Whom he had ever present. In the course of the year 1650, as he approached the sixty-third year of his age, his infirmities not having in the least abated, he perceived that the end of his life was at hand, and wishing to be released from all worldly matters, he made his will, and constituted his beloved Congregation of the Oratory, of which he was the Father and Founder, his heir. He was not mistaken in supposing his death to be at hand; for about the middle of September in the same year he was seized with a violent fever, which confined him to his bed, from which he was never more to rise.

The physicians applied their most effectual remedies to this violent disease, but without success. He however amidst the severity of the disease and the sufferings which the remedies are wont to cause, entirely absorbed in God, remained expecting his end, having his heart and affections perfectly conformed to the Will of God. Every day did he reconcile himself by sacramental Confession, that he might be more perfectly disposed to receive the Bread of Angels, with which he was daily fed, enjoying the same or even greater devotion and confidence in this extremity than he had been accustomed to during all his life.

Meanwhile as the malady rapidly increased, and as his strength failed, and he was quickly approaching the grave, he begged to receive the

last Sacraments, to restore and invigorate his spirit for the last struggle which was at hand. To comply with his just request, both the Holy Viaticum and Extreme Unction were administered to him by Father Gio. Maria Monterosso, his dearest spiritual son.

The good old man meanwhile, notwithstanding his grey hairs and the chills of approaching death, could not conceal the flame within his breast, and weak as he was, with great vigour of spirit he exhorted the bystanders, and incited them to the love of God, contempt of themselves, and avoidance of the vanities of the world. Moreover, he recommended himself with great humility to the prayers of all, that they might obtain for him patience, and grace to meet death with cheerfulness, that he might so fulfil the Divine Will. And in truth he obtained from the Lord what he sought; for without being the least alarmed at the approach of death, which is wont to cause such terror to others, he endured with insuperable patience the paroxysms which are its usual forerunners, and with the greatest serenity of mind and countenance continued his usual spiritual employments up to the last day, and even, so to speak, to the last moment of his life.

Accordingly on the 28th of September, the vigil of the Prince of the heavenly host, St. Michael, the day on which he was to render his soul to his Creator, after having been as usual reconciled in the Sacrament of Penance, he received with the greatest devotion and tenderness

the Bread of Angels, and having thanked the Lord for so great a benefit, as though he had been in perfect health, he wished, in imitation of his great Father, to hear the confessions of his penitents, and desired that all might have free access to his room. After dinner, having received a visit from two Fathers of the Seraphic Order of Capuchins, who were well known for their goodness, he spent a considerable time with them in holy conversation and spiritual discourses, the subject of which was the glorious and heavenly country of Paradise, and love and affectionate union with God, after which he sighed. He survived until the hour of vespers, when he was seized with severe fainting fits, which indicated that his departure was at hand. He then invoked the aid of his great Queen and protectress Mary, and of the Saints his advocates, especially St. Antony of Padua, the great doctor of the Church, St. Jerome, and of his own great Father, St. Philip, and wholly and entirely resigned his own will into the hands of God.

At the sad news of his dying condition all the Fathers of the Congregation hastened to his room, with many others his penitents, who kneeling round his bed, and knowing that the loss of their dear Father was at hand, with great earnestness besought him to give them his blessing, which with unfailing constancy and affection he bestowed upon all, and then asked them to assist him with their prayers in this awful passage. The recommendation of his soul in the prayers instituted by the Church, was then made by his be-

loved son and disciple, Father Gio. Maria Monterosso. The dying old man, persevering in these holy affections, was seized about two hours before sunset with a violent paroxysm, which reduced him to an extremity, but did not take away the use of his senses; so that he had still the power of invoking constantly the most holy names of Jesus and Mary, which are the only restorative of the dying, and of kissing the wounds of his crucified Lord, and of spending these his last moments in acts of fervent and perfect charity. Thus after a short agony, nature at length yielding to the violence of the disorder, Father Antonio Maria Cortivo de' Santi sweetly expired on the 28th of September, A.D. 1650, in the 63rd year of his age, passing from this life to another, not so much laden with years, as full of merits earned by his many heroic actions and labours, supported for the glory of God and the salvation of souls.

Some religious of reputation of the Seraphic Order of the Strict Observance of St. Francis, affirmed that they heard in Roverè of Trent from the lips of the Mother Suor Giovanna Maria, a nun of the Order of St. Clare, and remarkable for the excellence of her life, and the special favours she received from her Divine Spouse, that on the day of the death of Father Santi, being engaged in prayer and in an ecstacy, she saw his soul take flight to heaven without being touched by the pains of purgatory.

It may easily be supposed how great was the affliction of his children in the Congregation at this heavy loss of their Father and Founder, as

they were thus deprived of its most solid basis and support; and although they consoled themselves with the hope of his eternal repose, the sensible loss caused them no common grief. But greater than of any other was the affliction of Father Gio. Maria Monterosso, who, although he was a man of great virtue and resignation to the Will of God, yet for a whole year was unable to restrain his tears at the sweet remembrance of his dear Father. Nevertheless the tears of his children gave place to the honour due to the remains of their deceased father. His body after having been opened by the physicians, who discovered that the lungs were corroded by acrid humours, which had caused the fever, was clothed in sacerdotal vestments, and publicly exposed in the church of the Congregation.

Great was the crowd of devout persons, who on the 29th of September, the day on which his obsequies were celebrated, went to the church of St. Thomas the Martyr, to see for the last time the great labourer, who had toiled so incessantly for their spiritual welfare.

When the Fathers had performed this last duty to their founder, his body was laid in a coffin of cypress-wood, which was deposited in the burial-place prepared for the Fathers of the Congregation before the altar of the Blessed Sacrament. On a plate of lead was engraved the following inscription: "Hic corpus conditum est Venerabilis Patris Sacerdotis Antonii Mariæ Cortivi de Sanctis Patavini, qui in hâc Ecclesiâ Sti Thomæ Martyris Cantuariensis fundavit Congregationem

Presbyterorum Oratorii, juxta institutum Sti Philippi Nerii, quique frequentiam Sacramentorum, ac cultum divinum tum verbo tum vitæ exemplo mirifice propagavit, et plurima Oratoria virorum necnon mulierum, non tam in hac urbe, quam in finitunis circumquaque, tum urbibus tum earum agris instituit. Natus est die quarta Novembris, 1586. Emigravit vero è vivis ad cœlum die 28 Septembris, 1650, hora 22 vigiliæ Sti Michaelis Archangeli." "Here lies the body of the Venerable Father Antonio Maria Cortivo de' Santi, priest, who in this church of St. Thomas the Martyr, founded the Congregation of priests of the Oratory, according to the institute of St. Philip Neri, and who both by word and his own example wonderfully increased the attendance on the Sacraments and the divine service. He instituted many Oratories of men and women, not only in this city, but in the neighbourhood, and in the villages as well as the towns. He was born on the 4th of November, 1586; and passed from this world to heaven on the 28th of September, 1650, at the 22nd hour on the vigil of St. Michael the Archangel."

His memory however was not buried in the tomb; but still lives and will always live in many ways. In the first place, he lives in the many profitable spiritual works which he composed; for besides the book of "Spiritual Combats" for the use of beginners, proficients, and the perfect, of which we have already spoken, he also composed "Meditations on the Most Holy Crucifix," "Exhortation to correspond with the

End of our Being, and to serve God," "Treatises on the Motives for serving God," "on Violence," "on Perseverance," on "the Will of God," and "the Presence of God," together with the "Exercise of Self-knowledge," and the "Practice of the Purification of the Heart from inordinate affections," all most excellent and profitable works, in which his high spirituality, learning, and devotion are conspicuous. Again he still lives, inasmuch as the sweet odour and fame of his virtues still continues in the city of Padua, and in so many other cities and villages which he visited for the glory of God and the salvation of souls, and where he diffused the fragrance of his holy and heroic virtues. He lives too in the numerous Oratories, amounting to a hundred, which he founded, in which still continues that spirit of devotion with which they were set up by him; but especially does he live in the Congregation of the Oratory, which he established in Padua, in which his children are the living images of their Father's virtues, which they have so well copied and still continue to copy in themselves. He also lives in the history, although abridged, of his virtuous life, composed by Giovanni Chiericato, so often referred to, who with a skilful pen has described him to the life, although with great conciseness. And lastly, in order that his devout children, who were desirous of having a memorial of his bodily features, might satisfy their desire, pictures of him were engraved, in which however it would seem that he is but imperfectly represented. Under them

was placed this short inscription: "The Venerable Father Antonio Maria Cortivo de' Santi, first Provost of the Congregation of the Oratory of St. Philip Neri in Padua, and the restorer of many Oratories of men and women in the most Serene Territory of Venice and elsewhere."

The virtues of this servant of God and his successful labours made him truly great, and as such he was regarded by persons deservedly esteemed for birth, learning, and goodness. The Father Master Frà Giacomo of Bagnacavallo, General of the Minors Conventual of St. Francis, was his great friend, and had a high opinion of his virtues. So great an esteem had he for the book of Spiritual Combats composed by him, that he ordered the novices of his Order who were brought up in the well-known convent of St. Anthony of Padua, to learn to practise the exercises contained in it; and so highly did he think of the Oratory, that he often asked leave to preach there. But it was not only individuals of high reputation, who held him in great esteem, but the whole population of different places revered him and paid him respect by the opinion they had of his singular goodness, and the great zeal which he testified for the salvation of souls. What happened in the year 1631 is an instance in point, and shows not a little what a high opinion the people had of him. In that year he happened to be in the district of Mel adjoining Feltrè, for the purpose of preaching the divine word according to his custom, and was the guest of a gentleman

of the place, one of whose servants died in the house one night. As a great part of Italy was at that time afflicted with the scourge of the plague, a suspicion entered the mind of the magistrate of the place, that this servant had died of this contagious disease, and accordingly he forbade Father Santi to leave the house. The sound of the bell had already announced to the people that the hour for the sermon was at hand, and they had assembled in great numbers in the Cathedral. But having there learned that he was forbidden to leave the house, they immediately quitted the church and hastened to the piazza before the house where he lodged, and crying out they earnestly begged, not to be deprived of the benefit and consolation of his powerful words. So persevering were the requests of the people, that the good father was obliged to make use of the window of the house as a pulpit, from which he was obliged to preach to satisfy their just demands. This he did with such satisfaction and attention on the part of the people, that not even the slightest murmur was heard, although the number of persons assembled in the piazza was very large; and that nothing might be wanting, the souls of those who heard him derived the greatest profit from his words. Even the devil, the father of pride, showed that he had a reverential fear of his person and his commands. He had possessed a poor woman at Alano near Piave in the diocese of Padua, where Father Santi was preaching in the year 1633, and as the sermons of the servant

of God were most fatal to the evil spirit, owing to the continual losses he occasioned him by the sword of the word of God, he uttered howlings so loud from the mouth of the possessed person, that the people could not hear the sermon. But the disturbance he caused by his cries resulted in his own greater confusion; for Father Santi, with the authority given to him by God, turned to the evil one and said, "Be silent, and cause no disturbance." At these words he remained silent, and the possessed woman did not again open her mouth, or make any commotion. The people were amazed to see the ready obedience of the proud one to the words of Father Santi, and many sinners, moved no less by the wonderful event than by his powerful words, were converted; so that the devil, who had endeavoured to hinder this result, became, so to say, against his will the instrument of it.

CHAPTER V.

ON THE MANY AND GREAT VIRTUES WITH WHICH FATHER ANTONIO MARIA CORTIVO DE' SANTI WAS ADORNED.

From the instructions which Father Santi was constantly taking care to instil into others both by his writings and his words, it is easy to discover, how great was the love which he bore towards God. He was often accustomed to

say with the greatest energy, "My children, the whole contest is holy; but one thing I esteem most holy, and such as prevails over all the rest, and that is, to think, speak, and act always with God and His holy love for our end." And what he taught he practised thoroughly himself, as he always thought, spoke, and acted for the high end of the glory of God and His holy love. And in truth his thoughts were ever turned towards God, as surely as the magnet to the pole; and hence I am convinced, that what he often said in the Oratory he experienced most thoroughly in himself. "He who is engaged in traffic," he would say, "is always thinking of it, and so he who loves God, cannot do less than always think of God and walk in His divine presence. My children, let every one imagine, that in the world there is no one besides God and himself; and this, in order to be always thinking of God and to find Him in every place." Such were the words of Father Santi, and so precisely did he in every place and in every action look to his Lord, with whom he continued so united and so recollected, that even when employed in outward actions, he was exercising himself in acts of the presence of God. Thus, as the flame of love was rendered still more ardent by the nourishment with which he supplied it, he attained, as the author of his life so often quoted affirms, a total transformation of his heart and affections, so to fix them entirely upon God. Although his mind was always fixed upon the Divine Majesty, nevertheless, it seemed as though at times, he was more espe-

cially and with a sweeter and stronger bond united to Him, as he often seemed to be in an ecstasy, and, as it were, out of himself and all absorbed in God.

In the Combat of the Perfect, which he composed, and which is designed to teach souls the holy union with God by means of a holy love, are contained the most sublime instructions, and the most noble exercises of this queen of virtues; and he was faithful in practising what he wrote in so sweet and efficacious a manner. In his children and disciples he was content, as he often used to say, that the love of God should be in their hearts like oil, which always floats above any other fluid; but in the ample vessel of his own heart, he was not content that the oil of charity should rest on the top only; but he would not permit it to receive anything else, that is to say, any other love.

His words, moreover, no less than his thoughts, had always God for their end. His speech was truly eloquent, but always directed, from his great love of God, to His glory. To make a sermon or spiritual discourse, he had no need to borrow thoughts from many books; but it sufficed him to have the sacred Scriptures or the Breviary, from which he would take a sentence at hazard. With this he would begin, and continue to speak with such eloquence, spirit, and fervour, that his discourse might last for whole hours, without his being at a loss for matter or suitable arguments. He would often preach three or four times in the same day, and how-

ever long he continued, or however many sermons he delivered in the same day, his hearers never became weary of listening to him; and the desire of hearing him increased more and more with the unanimous resolution to give themselves, as in duty bound, to the service of God, and to practise the holy counsels which he taught.

But this is not to be wondered at, as his words were so ardent, as with a sweet force to penetrate the hearts of those who heard him. Neither the worst habits of sin nor the ties of worldly vanities could resist the burning arrows, which issued from his mouth. Innumerable were those, and among them many young men most completely given up to vanity, who on hearing his sermons, touched with the flame of sacred love, which burned within him, abandoned the vanities of the world and ran to his feet, beseeching him to help them, and protesting that they were resolved to serve God.

There is nothing which more strongly resists the Divine Word, than the iron armour of an obstinate will, which positively opposes it; yet even this seemed to give place to the force of his words. Father de Santi once went to Pieve di Sacco to visit the Oratory there, when by the efficacy of his preaching, more than eighty persons were converted to God, and enrolled themselves as brethren. But what causes astonishment is, that many of them before going to hear him, had firmly resolved in their hearts not to yield to his persuasions or add their names

to this holy confraternity. Nevertheless, when they heard his exhortations, they felt themselves so inflamed with the force of divine love, that not being able to resist the ardour they felt, they were forced by a gentle violence to flock to his feet, and there acknowledged the sweet power of divine grace, which had induced them to surrender themselves as vanquished, although their former dispositions had rendered them unworthy of the favours of Heaven. Then cheerfully putting themselves under his obedience, and readily cutting off their long hair, they humbly entreated to be admitted members of the Oratory. Innumerable were such instances of success, as the same author of his Life asserts, in many other places which he visited, to found or restore the Oratories.

That his great works were done under the influence of charity and for the glory of God, will readily be allowed from what has been recorded in these pages; nevertheless, to prove it more clearly, we subjoin what could not conveniently be mentioned before. His life was a continued series of labours for the service and glory of God; and especially in the long period of the thirty-six years, which he lived after receiving the priesthood, he did so many and so great works, that one single day of his was marked with more virtuous deeds than a month, so to say, of other fervent labourers. After having preached for a long time with the efficacy which has been already mentioned, however heated and fatigued he might be, he would

take his seat in the confessional, in order to gather the fruit of the seed he had sown; nor was he ever weary of this fatiguing ministry. Often while celebrating Mass he would deliver two discourses to the people, the first after the Gospel, and another after giving communion to those who assisted. After having offered the Divine Sacrifice and made his thanksgiving, he might be seen again in the confessional, on the watch to capture sinful souls, where he would remain until the appointed hour for preaching; and then ascending the pulpit, as though he were but beginning his labours, he would preach with the vehemence of a second St. Basil.

His labours however did not end with the sermon; for he would either return to the confessional, or go to take what he called a recreation, which was such only because his spirit, devoted to labour and eagerly desiring the glory of God, found no little delight in it, although it was but fresh toil for his already wearied mind. To make this spiritual recreation, a devout audience used to assemble in a certain place, where there was suspended the triumphant standard of the Cross, with the image of the Redeemer hanging upon it, between two lighted candles. Here the servant of God would begin to discourse on the excessive love of Christ towards man, and to call to mind the immensity of His divine charity; and then the internal flame of his own love breaking forth, he would speak of it with such ardour, and in terms so lofty, as to inflame all who heard him. He was then followed by others

who also spoke and conferred on their sentiments and desire of loving God; then he invited them to humble themselves in this public assembly, to give thanks to the Lord for what He has suffered for love of us. To this invitation succeeded the offerings and entreaties of many who desired to suffer humiliation. If any one had still retained any vain ornament, he would immediately take it off, and with virtuous contempt cast it away, and others prostrate at full length on the ground, would earnestly beg to receive some token of contempt, the more discourteous the more acceptable; and others acknowledging themselves to be vile clay, would ask to be trampled under foot.

Neither floods nor snows could extinguish or even cool his charity; so that to promote the glory of God, he undertook many dangerous journeys, from which neither rain nor snow nor any inclemency of the season could keep him back. He despised every danger, and willingly submitted to all discomforts in order to attain his end. He again and again traversed not only his own diocese but others also, to plant and visit his Oratories, of which he founded about a hundred: nor did he seek any other fruit from his toilsome expeditions, but that of drawing souls from the vanities of the world, to the knowledge and service of God. Thus, as all his thoughts, words, and deeds were always ordered for the glory of God, it is clearly proved, that his heart was not only warmed, but thoroughly inflamed with the holy love of God.

This bright flame was ever discovering itself more and more in the servant of God, by the love and reverence he had even from his earliest years for his Lord in the Sacrament; and in the pains and diligence he showed in planting the same love and reverence in the hearts of others. The thin veil of the Eucharist accidents cannot so hide the Divine Spouse, as to hinder loving souls from running after the fragrance of His odours; hence it was that the enamoured heart of Father Santi, from the first years of his youth, was most eagerly desirous of frequently uniting itself with his Lord in the Sacrament. And it was because, in his condition as a layman, owing to the unhappy circumstances of those times, he suffered from the want of that Heavenly Bread, that he with the approbation of his superiors first entertained the thought of becoming a priest, that he might thus have the power not only of enjoying it abundantly himself, but of dispensing it with liberality to those of the faithful, who eagerly longed to receive it.

And in fact, after he had received the sacred character of the priesthood, he never omitted to celebrate, unless hindered by severe illness. To him also is due the credit of having introduced into his country and the neighbouring places the frequent reception of the holy Communion; for before, scarcely even on Sundays in the more frequented Churches, was it easy to find an opportunity of receiving this Divine Food; and those who did so, were charged with singularity. There were not wanting even per-

sons who would gaze in astonishment at those who did so; whence it happened that many timid persons, through human respect, and in order not to be a gazingstock to these unreasonable men, abstained from it. But no sooner was Father Santi promoted to the priesthood in the year 1614, than he thought it the duty of his office to employ his tongue in exciting the faithful to confidence in approaching the altar with greater frequency, after due preparation. And in fact his words were so effectual, resting as they did upon the authority of the sacred councils, and the opinions of the holy Fathers, that the souls, which were perishing for want of this Divine Food, flocked to receive it in the church of St. Thomas, even on week days. Hence it was, that seeing the evident fruit which was gathered from this practice, many devout and learned religious, and zealous secular priests, moved by his example, as well in the city as in the villages of the diocese of Padua, began to give more frequent attendance in the confessional, and to be more liberal in administering the Bread of Angels in their churches; so that the longing after this heavenly Food grew stronger each day among the people, thanks to his fervent exhortations; and since that time this devout city has been behind no other in devotion and frequent attendance at the holy Communion.

But if he was the means of introducing frequent Communion in his native country, he also knew how, by his exhortations, to lead men to

the proper mode of preparing themselves to receive with fruit this Supersubstantial Bread; for as well from his chair in the Oratory as from the confessional, he taught his penitents that they ought to rouse themselves to communicate each time with as much spirit and reverence, as if it were the last Communion they were to make in their lives; and that, for this end, it would be well to imagine that they were receiving the Divine Sacrament as the Viaticum; justly affirming, that they would thus, as far as human frailty permits, be worthily disposed to receive the Bread of Life with profit. The value of this holy counsel was proved, in the year 1636, by Petrobello Petrobelli and Girolamo Barisoni, two gentlemen of high rank, in the city of Padua. They were both penitents of Father Santi, and obedient to the least sign he gave them. They died, both one and the other, without being able to speak, having been seized with a sudden attack of apoplexy; but as they frequented the holy Communion, according to the instructions of their director, they had the grace to receive the Communion, as it were, in the way of Viaticum, on the very day on which they unexpectedly died. After having excited the desire of this precious Food in so many individuals, he wished to institute, as we may say, a public and costly banquet, to which all might hasten, on an appointed day, to satisfy themselves with that flesh of the incarnate Lamb, which remains entire, even after all the Christian people have eaten. For this end, he introduced the general Communion, and ap-

pointed that this great function should be held on the Sunday within the Octave of the Ascension, that on those days, when we commemorate the triumphal return of Christ to His Father's kingdom, the faithful might not suppose themselves to be left altogether orphans, while they had so ready at hand the opportunity of giving Him lodging in the house of their own souls.

The introduction of this devout custom was so agreeable to Mgr. Marco Cornaro, Bishop of Padua, and a prelate of great virtue and zeal, that by his influence he obtained from the Vicar of Christ a plenary Indulgence for the Brothers and Sisters of Christian Doctrine, who should communicate on that day. It is impossible to describe, how this inducement, added to the privilege of receiving the Lord's Body, attracted the faithful; so that all the Oratories, founded by Father Santi, came in procession to Padua, singing hymns and spiritual canticles. Also the schools of Christian Doctrine, in the same city, joined in procession, and went to visit the church appointed by the Bishop, to be partakers of this treasure of holy indulgences; so that on that day many thousands of persons communicated annually. And then by his sermons, colloquies, and other spiritual exercises, he kindled such devotion in this multitude of people, that piety and veneration towards the Blessed Sacrament increased to the astonishment of all.

But although the concourse of persons who on that day crowded round the sacred Table, longing to be satisfied, was so great, nevertheless his

expansive heart, although in the highest degree gratified thereby, was not altogether satisfied, and he was often heard to say, "The greatest consolation I can have in this world, is to see crowds of persons frequent the most holy Sacrament. I should wish, that on this Sunday, on which the procession is made, all, great and small, should not only accompany the Lord, but also receive the Communion."

In many places we have already related, how the bright flame of heavenly love, which the servant of God concealed in his breast, sometimes showed itself even externally; but never was it more clearly discovered, than when he was going to administer to others the Bread of Angels. He was accustomed, before communicating the brothers of the Oratory, to make a short discourse, in which he endeavoured at the moment, to excite in the hearts of his children the love of God. And because there is no more powerful motive to induce men to love, than the certainty of being loved, he spoke of the love which Christ bears towards man; and at these reminiscences so pleasant to him, and at the presence of his Lord in the Sacrament, the flame of his charity was so kindled, that it shone forth in his countenance, which then seemed a living flame; and it even appeared as if flashes of bright light issued from it, as from a thunder-cloud.

Sometimes in the midst of these expressions of love, which proceeded from his inflamed heart, or the affectionate colloquies he held with his God in the Sacrament, he remained so absorbed

in Him, as for a long time to remain happily without the use of his senses. But then, more than at any time, did he persuade and excite the bystanders to the love of the Lord; for the people seeing him, as if in an ecstacy or spiritual rapture, from his devotion towards the most holy Sacrament, were filled with compunction and tenderness.

On other occasions, when he saw the divine Sacrament venerated with any special devotion, not only was his countenance lighted up with love, but his heart was melted like wax. This he left on record in his own hand-writing, when on a certain occasion, in the year 1638, a silver lamp having been presented to the Congregation by a devout person, that it might always remain burning before the high Altar in the church of St. Thomas, he wrote in a certain book these touching words: "Note—a lamp of silver was given by a devout person to the Congregation, to hang before the high Altar in honour (Oh! how can the heart but melt?) of the thousand times most beloved Sacrament."

And as he loved so ardently the Divine Son, he was likewise most devoted to the Mother, and professed a more than filial and devout affection for the Queen of Paradise. He was also particularly devoted to St. Anthony of Padua, whom he had chosen for his especial protector and advocate, and whose worship he took care to promote in all the Oratories which he established. Most heartfelt also was the affection which he bore to his own great Father St. Philip,

loving him as such a father deserves, and venerating him with the reverence due to so great a saint. In every place he visited, he spread his fame, and introduced a devotion for him; and in order that it might be more firmly rooted, he made presents of small portions of his venerated relics, a precious treasure he had acquired as a gift from the Fathers of the Congregation of Rome. He desired moreover that they should be received by the people with solemn processions, that they might obtain the honour they deserved. But his greatest devotion to him consisted in imitating his virtues, as shall hereafter be shown.

The bright flame of Father Antonio's charity was, as it ought to be, twofold; he was entirely devoted to God, and at the same time entirely devoted to his neighbour, in order to do the Will of God, and promote His glory. The strongest inducement he had to embrace the ecclesiastical state was to be able to assist souls and to lead them to God. All his studies, all his journeys, all his labours, were purposely directed to enlighten souls, that they might be led to serve and love their Creator; and lastly, without ever growing weary, he employed his whole life in the apostolical duty of calling and converting souls to God.

It is no wonder that one who had an aim so pure, should by his preaching gain many glorious victories over sinful souls; and that with the co-operation of grace, even the most obstinate and those who derided him, should surrender

to the force of his words. So it happened at Monselice in the year 1636, when a person named Alfiere, called by the soldiers Giovanni Bozza, who had been joking at him, after hearing his sermon, most happily changed his jests into lamentations, and was so penetrated and moved to compunction by his efficacious words, that he prostrated himself at his feet, and desired to open to him the secrets of his conscience; and then after having confessed, he immediately cut off the long hair, of which he had been most vain, and went and entered himself in the Oratory. But not only were his exhortations from the pulpit thus powerful; but even the words which he used in familiar conversation had equal efficacy. The love of God rendered him no less diligent than clear-sighted. When he walked through the streets and met any persons, whose aspect seemed to indicate that they cared little for their eternal salvation, that is to say, when he saw them idle and loitering, he would address them with the greatest affability, and endeavour to insinuate himself into their confidence, and with a winning manner ask them, how long it was since they had reconciled themselves with Christ in the Sacrament of penance. He would then invite and even entreat them to go and meet him in the Church of St. Thomas, where he would receive them with the greatest charity, and help them by sweet and easy means to live in the grace of God; and lastly, to give greater weight to his exhortations, he would add some effectual motive, drawn from the eter-

nal truths of the Catholic religion, by which they would be so affected with compunction, as to accept his invitation, and go to the Church of the Congregation, there to adjust their ill-ordered consciences.

Sometimes by adding to his words some external act of affection, he gained astonishing success. Once when he was preaching at Pieve di Sacco, a corporal in the army, named Lorenzo Racco, went to the Oratory to hear him, not out of devotion, but from motives of mere curiosity. Father Santi saw him, and going to meet him, affectionately drew him to his breast, saying to him, "God wishes to join you to this Oratory, and to make you a pattern of modesty to all the world." He had not been in the least disposed to make so great a change; nevertheless on hearing these words, and seeing himself so tenderly embraced, he felt himself so inflamed with the love of God, that without parley, and to the great astonishment of the beholders, he went and cut off his hair, as a pledge of the firm resolution he had taken of changing his life. He then made a good and contrite confession, and according to the prediction of the servant of God, having entered himself as a brother of the Oratory, persevered in it, in a most exemplary manner, to the end of his life.

So great was the charity of Father Antonio towards his neighbour, that it seemed to reach the utmost limits; inasmuch as he not only devoted his labours and prolonged toils to their spiritual good; but was moreover ready to shed

his blood in so good a cause. Oftentimes he was heard to say these words, "I feel myself ready to shed my blood and lose my life, either in the confessional or in the Oratory, to help my neighbour." And not only was the soul of his neighbour dear to him; but he was solicitous about the body also. He was most tender-hearted and compassionate not only towards men, but towards dumb animals also; and to relieve the wants of his neighbour, he was continually giving abundant alms; insomuch that his patrimony seemed to be the common property of these poor creatures, rather than his own. If the poor countrymen, who cultivated his estates, ever complained of the scantiness of the crops, without much inquiry as to the truth of their statement, he would promptly remit a part of their rent, saying, "How well we are provided with the conveniences of life, and how miserably these poor men; and yet they labour for us with so much toil!"

Much as Father Santi had laboured for the glory of God, and the good of his neighbour, he nevertheless often used to say to his spiritual children, "Pray God for me; for I say and say, but never do. I beg you with all my heart to pray God to help me." Every one will see most clearly from these words of his, how profound was his humility, which not only made him think slightingly of his great works, but made them disappear altogether from his sight; so that he could no longer recognise them, and esteemed himself to be altogether destitute of good deeds,

whereas the whole web of his life was interwoven with the thread of precious works more than with days and hours.

One of his great works was undoubtedly the foundation of the Congregation of the Oratory in his own country, which he not only attributed entirely to God, but declared that all that he had done in the matter had been ill done. Thus after having secured it by the Bull of perpetual union with the benefice of St. Thomas, and the ducal authority of the Most Serene Republic, he recorded it in his own book in these words, "I am filled with confusion, because the Divine Majesty has granted me the grace to behold in my life-time, this work of His thus thoroughly established, as well in its ecclesiastical as its temporal position. May it please the Merciful God, that the Congregation may always increase in good, by daily aiding souls without any interested motive. I confess that I have done nothing but mar the whole. God Himself has done all that there is in it of good. To Him alone be praise for ever, and contempt to me the most unworthy Antonio Maria Santi." Such are his words, from which it may be seen how profound was his humility, and low the esteem he had of himself. But, as if his humility were not satisfied with depriving him in his own estimation of the honour of being founder of the Congregation, it moved him also to lay down the office of Superior or Provost. Here however his humility was encountered by the respect which

his children justly felt for him; but in the end it was victorious.

It was in the year 1637, that Father Santi, seeing the Congregation enriched with the kind favours of Heaven, and firmly rooted in the city of Padua, entreated the Fathers to be allowed to resign the office of Superior, which he had hitherto filled, and besought them to proceed to the election of a new Provost. As he was revered and beloved by all, as Father and Founder, and his government was so prudent that they could not desire a better, the Fathers resisted his request; but his humility, ambitious to obey rather than to command, rendered him so eloquent and persuasive, that at length the Fathers agreed to yield in order to satisfy and console him. Accordingly on the 18th of February, Father Gio. Battista Polacco was elected Superior in his stead. How greatly his spirit exulted on seeing himself in the humble condition of a subject, his own pen has recorded in these words: "Praise be for ever to the most humble and most obedient Jesus, whom I pray to grant me a true imitation of Him, interior and exterior, to His glory alone, so that never, never in my life, nor after my death, may I be praised; but always confounded, and as far as I am myself concerned, covered with disgrace; so that God alone may be glorified and honoured in me."

Nor can we wonder that he was so desirous of resigning his office, while he inwardly esteemed every one better and greater than himself, and in his dealings with others treated all as his

superiors. This is precisely what Chiericato, whom we have so often quoted, reports of him in his abstract of his Life, in these words: "In his heart he had always the lowest opinon of himself, and in his outward actions he sought only comtempt and self-humiliations; whence it arose, that he honoured all, and spoke of no one without reverence and respect, always considering every one better and greater than himself."

But a most certain proof of this profound humility, may be found not only in the sentiments expressed in the sixth exercise of his Combat of the advanced, but in every word, or rather syllable, contained in it, as any one, who is desirous of assuring himself, may see. We have already related, as occasion offered, how great was the ardour which he felt to advance the salvation of souls; nevertheless, such was his humility, as to offer no little opposition to the design he entertained of proceeding to the priesthood, in order to assist them more effectually. Indeed, there is reason to believe, that the humility, which made him think himself unworthy to approach the Altar, would have gained the victory, had not Monsignor Cornaro, his Bishop, to whom his virtue and humility were well known, induced him by his authoritative exhortations. This is the more probable when we remember that this same humility made him interrupt or rather change the labours which he underwent for the sake of his neighbour; which happened when his children suggested to him, as the opinion of

the Fathers of Rome as well as their own, that according to the custom of the Institute, it would be more suitable, to employ his talents in cultivating the vineyard of his own Congregation, than in labouring to found and visit new Oratories of seculars. For although the great profit which followed these labours was most manifest, he nevertheless submitted his own judgment to that of his children, and resigned his will into their hands without remonstrance; insomuch that at this intelligence he only said, "I pray our merciful God to give me the true spirit of our Founder St. Philip, that is, humility and obedience."

From this moment, as has been already related, he not only ceased to employ himself in these foundations, but the desire to do so entirely forsook him; a thing which could not have happened without some perturbation of spirit, unless he had been thus thoroughly grounded in humility, and had by his mean opinion of himself mortified his own judgment and understanding; so that in this act his humility appears even to surpass itself.

With this milk of humility and contempt of himself, he fed not only his penitents and the spiritual children of his Oratories, but much more the rising Congregation, instilling into it precisely that spirit in which it had been founded by the holy Father Philip in the first Fathers and subjects. In order that from the all-important ministry of the Divine Word, the only fruit gathered might be the good of souls, and not

esteem of the preachers, through the reputation of being eloquent speakers, he used to say plainly, "I do not wish to have highly ornamented discourses in our pulpits. He who speaks with simplicity is best understood. Let not those who seek fine words come to the Oratory." He thought, and with reason, that in proud and vain-glorious men, the devil dwells as in his own seat; so that he used to say, "Wherever man admits vain-glory, the devil takes his place:" and on the contrary he affirmed, that the devil would not even dare to approach the humble. "The demon," he said, "cannot tempt one who is humble, because he cannot stand near him." "The best disposition, according to the instructions of the Saints," he would say to his penitents, "is to humble ourselves before prayer, and to turn a glance on our own vileness; if you wish to make a good prayer, look first at the dust on your own shoes, and know how to esteem yourselves as that." Lastly, to engraft in the heart of his children an extreme horror of pride and self-esteem, he would say, "The devil has only one bridge by which he can enter our hearts, and that is, the love and esteem of ourselves." And in truth he had a right to expect the greater success in bringing up his children in holy humility, inasmuch as he, who had made such advances in perfection, had been in his early youth especially trained in this virtue, by his first spiritual director, Marco Manzoni, the parish-priest of St. Agnes, as has been mentioned before.

Poverty is ever most dear to the humble, and accordingly Father Santi was in the highest degree enamoured of it; and although the holy Father Philip left the subjects of the Oratory the free dominion and honest enjoyment of their patrimony, nevertheless as he was most desirous of living in poverty, he wished to experience the effects of it in himself, although he retained the possession of his hereditary estates.

Accordingly he dressed himself as a poor man, and under his cassock wore a habit so old and torn, that it would scarcely hold together; nevertheless, he still seemed to himself to dress too luxuriously, as he had his eyes fixed on the nakedness of his crucified Redeemer. Unlike the generality of men, who are ever aiming at greater conveniences in this world, his desire was to be deprived of them; and in fact, he did deprive himself of them, not only because he made his patrimony the poor man's rather than his own, but also because his generous heart made him disdain to touch even his own money himself, insomuch that he desired that it should pass through the hands of the "spenditore" of the house, or of some brother of the Oratory, in whom he had confidence.

His room breathed the sweet fragrance of Christian and ecclesiastical poverty; and he used to say that the apartment which was least ornamented was most beautiful, and that every one, without seeking other ornaments, ought to be content with a cross drawn with charcoal on the bare wall, a sentiment which ought to put to the

blush many ecclesiastics, and even many of those who live in community, who, although they make a profession of having abandoned the world and its vanities, nevertheless suffer their heart to be captivated by trifling fancies for little curiosities and useless furniture, which, rather than ornaments, are superfluous and unseemly encumbrances in the rooms of ecclesiastics.

But it was not only of vain ornaments, but of every earthly thing that he made the least possible account, as may be plainly gathered from his instructions. "My brethren," he used to say, "do not love the things of the world, because they are an impediment to the love of God." In order not to feel the loss of these things, he gave this good advice, viz. that we ought to esteem things present as if past, and when we hear of the loss of any of these things, we have only to say, "This is an old matter, I have known it long ago." To make men understand how deceitful the world is, and how easily it changes and betrays us, he used to compare it to the grave-digger; saying, "The world is like our grave-digger; meeting me just now, he said, 'Your Reverence's most obedient servant,' and within a few days he will lay me under ground. How many are there to-day honoured by the world, who will to-morrow be loaded with its reproaches!"

In temperance this good priest was a perfect pattern, a strong proof of which was, that he never complained or was dejected about the quantity, quality, or arrangements of the table,

little things which sometimes cause no little annoyance to certain fastidious and delicate persons who live in community; but which were so offensive to the holy Father Philip, that he said, when among his children he found any, who complained about matters relating to the table, and thus disturbed their companions, he used to advise them to leave the house, as we read in the nineteenth chapter of his Life by Father Bacci. But as Father Santi would have grieved, had he been in the habit of leaving every day some part of his scanty pittance, so for a long time at the beginning, when the Congregation was still in its infancy, he was content with a plate of soup alone. During the time the dinner lasted, it was not so much his body which he refreshed as his spirit, by means of holy thoughts and steady attention to the spiritual reading. But as the most noble part of temperance is chastity, he preserved this with the greatest care and diligence; so that he had the reward of never having defiled it, as is recorded by the author of his Life in these words: "The purity of his life was never stained by a single action contrary to chastity. This he guarded with all diligence by exhibiting at all times and in all places the most angelic deportment." Accordingly this servant of God shrank with abhorrence from any object, which could in any way obscure this purity; so that he mortified with the greatest caution, or rather severity, his senses, and especially his eyes, insomuch as not to allow them to gaze or even

cast a passing glance upon the face of any woman. So that if he met any in the street, perceiving it beforehand, he turned down his eyes; and when on occasion of any feast he feared lest he should meet any, he would keep them fixed on the ground the whole way. This was particularly observed one day when he went to the church of St. Justina in Padua; for as there was in the street a great crowd of women, who were going to that devotion, he fixed his eyes so steadily on the ground that he never raised them, until like a spotless dove he re-entered the ark of his Congregation. Nor did even advanced age seem to the chaste servant of God a sufficient security in speaking with women, to make any precaution unnecessary; insomuch that it was his maxim, that in speaking with women, however advanced in years, one ought to stand with eyes on the ground, and the mind recollected in God. With wise and prudent precaution he would not allow women to remain long in his confessional, nor to introduce needless conversation into their confessions; but having heard what belonged to the matter of the Sacrament, and given them absolution, he would send them away immediately. He also used to teach the same method to others, saying, "Do not stay giving spiritual instruction to women in the confessional, send them away quickly, and bid them take care to govern their houses, and they will be safe." So jealous was he of this virtue, that although when the good of souls was in question, he would hasten to their aid without

sparing himself; nevertheless when called to hear the confession of any woman ill in bed, contrary to his custom he would excuse himself, and would refer the duty to the parish-priest of the sick person, telling those who came for him to call the curate. It is then no wonder that his purity was so angelic, since he guarded it with such exquisite precautions.

The servants of God are never wanting in sufferings, as the Lord often visits them with infirmities; and as men of the world, who are ever opposed to virtue, try them with affronts and contempt, so that more than any they ought always to have the shield of patience ready at hand. With this did Father Santi defend himself against the attacks of sickness and the arrows of persecution. In the year 1623 he was seized with a most acute pain in the knee, but this was not able to draw from him a single complaint, as he willingly supported all with resignation to the Divine Will, in which he was so well disciplined, that he published a treatise on it, in which he recorded all the motives, by which he had himself been so happily influenced. He was also troubled a long time before his death with a defluxion in the legs, which from its severity caused a wound; but even this was not enough to make him discontinue his toilsome occupations, or to destroy his conformity with the Will of God. His patience was still more conspicuous in his suffering with readiness the contradictions of men, which are oftentimes more severely felt than the infirmities which God sends. No unpropitious

event, however severe, was capable of dejecting him, his countenance always preserving the serenity of a holy cheerfulness, because his heart was ever turned to God as to his only pole-star, and fixed on Him. Severe indeed was the trial which happened to him on one occasion in the presence of a numerous audience, and the more sensibly felt, as the author of it was a religious, and the subject a delicate one; yet it did not in the least disturb the peace of his heart, nor the serenity of his countenance, so that his tranquillity of demeanour had more effect than any sermon. When he was at Feltre engaged with a number of persons in one of his spiritual recreations, a religious, such however rather in habit than in disposition, who was present, instigated by a twofold fury, that, namely, of the devil who stirred him up, and of his own envy which gnawed him, did not hesitate to attack him most invidiously, and to reproach him with open calumnies and sarcasms, charging him in the presence of all with ignorance and stupidity, and adding other reproachful terms. The mind of Father Santi was not the least discomposed at this torrent of abuse; but distinguishing between the doctrine he taught and his own person, he answered him with sweetness and gentleness, speaking with humility of himself, but for the sake of the truth, proving the doctrine he had taught, to be sound and solid.

This noble instance of patience could not but win the affections of all who were spectators of it; but what is more, two gentlemen of that city,

who were present when it took place, persuaded more by his modesty and forbearance, than they would have been by the most fervent exhortations, forsook the world and clothed themselves in the coarse woollen habit of St. Francis, having entered the convent of the reformed Fathers, and proved themselves in religion to be men of singular excellence and learning.

We need not be surprised that Father Santi was so great a lover of patience; since he had so high an esteem for this virtue as to look upon it as a manifest sign of the virtue which springs up in the soul. "There is no greater sign of the sanctity of a soul," he would say, "than its being patient in tribulations;" and he ever affirmed, that he who does not love tribulations, loves not God, and used to add, "Let us remember the cross of our Lord, his thorns and sufferings, that we may be ready to endure with patience." In times of sickness he used to advise, to ask of God in the first place, patience to support it, and then the grace of recovery, if it should be expedient for the soul. Lastly, he was not content that trials should be accepted with the lips only, but used to say, "It is not enough to thank God in words only in times of adversity, but we must thank him with the whole heart." This good Servant of God was most strict in his observance of obedience, and desired that, after his own example, his children should live, so to say, immersed in obedience, which he explained by this apt comparison: "As a little bird," he used to say, "though confined in a

cage, hops about and is light-hearted, so do I wish, that my spiritual children should always live with joy within the precincts of holy obedience."

And because those who live under obedience, not unfrequently insensibly seek to follow their own fancies, with the approbation of their superior, desiring by an insufferable perversion of things, that his will should be conformed to their own, he gave this most important piece of advice. "The truly obedient person," he said, "ought not to say, 'Father, be pleased to allow me to do such a thing;' but rather, 'Father, be pleased to contradict me, and forbid me to do such a thing, for which I have a strong inclination.'"

Other virtues also were not wanting to adorn the soul of Father Santi, and especially such as are most necessary to the sons of St. Philip, and such as they ought especially to copy from their great Father, to whom he was most devout; and so with reason he made the greater part of his devotion consist in imitating his virtues, as is recorded by Chiericato, in whose words we shall conclude this short account of the life and virtues of Father Cortivo. "Above all, Father Santi ever strove to be a true imitator of the virtue of the glorious St. Philip Neri, living conformably to his spirit, most detached from the world, most desirous of mortification and contempt, zealous for the honour of God and the salvation of souls, indefatigable in hearing confessions, and in preaching the Word of God,

both in sermons in church, and in spiritual conferences in the Oratory, as well as in his own room, which was always open to all, and was visited by rich and poor, by wise and simple; to all of whom he gave the rules of eternal salvation, confirming them by his own exemplary life. So that to him might be applied what the Doctor St. Ambrose has said of the Patriarch Abraham: 'He was truly a great man, and such as Philosophy, with all her aspirations, could not imitate. Indeed, what he actually did was more than she even dreamed of, and the simple truth more glorious than the boastful falsehoods of her eloquence.'"

THE LIFE

OF

FATHER ANGELO MATTEUCCI,

FOUNDER OF THE ORATORY OF CAMERINO.

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CHAPTER I.

BIRTH AND EDUCATION OF MATTEUCCI. HE EMBRACES THE INSTITUTE OF THE ORATORY, AND ESTABLISHES IT IN HIS NATIVE PLACE, CAMERINO.

Father Angelo was born of the noble family of the Matteucci, one of the most illustrious in the city of Camerino, on the Feast of the Archangel S. Michael, September the 29th, 1561. It is related of him by Father Paolo Aringhi, of the Congregation of Rome, in his book called Triumphus Pœnitentiæ, that like S. Charles Borromeo a bright light shone around him at his birth presaging his future sanctity. His parents were Lorenzo Matteucci and Diana Guglielmi, both of them of noble descent. Angelo was baptised in the cathedral of Camerino, which is dedicated to Our Lady of the Annunciation, on the 4th of October, the Feast of S. Francis of Assisi: and it was not without appropriateness that he received the gift of regeneration in the temple of the Queen of Angels, thus consecrating the

first moments of his new life to Her, whose faithful and devout servant he ever after remained.

His early years were not merely remarkable for their great innocence, but also as betokening the state of life which he was one day to embrace. For besides his ready obedience to his parents, his modest and composed air, and the strong inclination he so early manifested towards Christian perfection, there was a maturity and manliness about his piety far in advance of his age. Thus while he loved to deck out little altars, he also delighted to pray before them. Again he frequently visited churches, not however from curiosity or amusement, but for prayer. He fitted up unused rooms in his father's house as Oratories, and invited his playmates there to listen to the word of God, which issuing from the fervour of his heart never failed to produce an effect on them; so that people were often astonished to hear such mature discourses from the mouth of a boy. His companions however were not all like Angelo, who hating idle sports found his only recreation in devotion: they were often therefore very reluctant to remain in his Oratories. To induce them to stay, he used to deprive himself of the delicacies and sweetmeats which children are so fond of, and keeping them by him, he bestowed them upon those who attended his sermons in these domestic Oratories.

The little boy was so intent upon exercises of piety, and so constant in his visits to the churches, that when his mother was asked by her friends

where her son was, she used to answer without disguise that no doubt he was in some church. As she was a person of piety, the devotion shown by her child gave her the liveliest satisfaction. The church which Angelo most frequented, was that of S. Michael, the captain of the Angelic Host, on whose feast he was born. This church too was near his father's house, and unlike other children he took no pleasure in going about the city. He also often visited the church of the Capuchins, situated about two miles from Camerino, being attracted there by the strict observance which reigned among these fathers; for as this was the first Capuchin convent founded, it was remarkable for its rigid maintenance of the rule. His spiritual guide was a father of the Conventual Friars of S. Francis, to whom the church of S. Michael belonged. When he had reached a proper age, he obtained leave from his director to approach the Eucharistic table, and so great was the purity of his life, that he was from that time permitted to receive the Bread of Angels every day. This practice he pursued during the rest of his life, always, however, with the leave of his confessors. Whenever he was accidentally prevented from going to communion, it is impossible to describe how great his sufferings were, for it seemed to him that he could not exist without the sustenance of this living Bread. Thus in after life he once said to a father of the Congregation which he had founded, "Think you that I could live an hour if I were deprived of communion." On

another occasion also he showed the intensity of his longings to unite himself to our Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, by declaring that, blind as he was, he would travel many and many a mile, if there were no means of communicating in the city of Camerino. Father Paolo Aringhi, of the Roman Oratory, says of him in his book Triumphus Pœnitentiæ: "If ever he was hindered from receiving the Divine Food of the altar, his countenance appeared so mournful, that it seemed as though when he was deprived of the Bread of Life, his life itself came to an end." These devout exercises, in which he employed himself during his early years, did not cause him to neglect the pursuit of human learning. It is incredible with what diligence he applied himself to his studies. He never lost a moment, but gave all the time which remained from his devotions to study and reading, until his eye-sight failing him he was obliged to relinquish these occupations.

Thus were spent the years of his boyhood; and at length as time passed on, his relations began to talk of his marriage and settlement in life. Angelo however was deeply afflicted at hearing his name mentioned in this connexion. His purity had ever been such that he could not endure the slightest expressions bordering on immodesty, and he either cut them short in the speaker's mouth, or else left the company abruptly. His love of this virtue went even further, for he could never listen patiently to any conversation about marriage. He therefore no soon-

er discovered the purpose of his relations, than he at once consecrated himself to God by a vow of perpetual chastity. Angelo had an uncle, who on hearing of this vow, and being well aware of his nephew's aversion to the world, resolved to induce him to enter the ecclesiastical state. In order to accomplish this in a suitable way, and to provide him with the means of living according to his rank, his uncle also purposed to resign in his favour a canonry in the cathedral which he possessed, and also the abbey of Fontebuono, which produced an income of five hundred crowns a year. The good youth was pleased with the state of life which his uncle had designed for him, but he was no less firm in refusing the proffered dignities and revenues.

About the time Angelo entered the ecclesiastical state, he began to suffer from the disease in his eyes, which afterwards ended in total blindness. This was doubtless owing to a disposition of Providence, in order that he might attend the better to prayer and the interior life. The origin of his blindness is said to have been the long time he used to spend in a damp underground room of his father's house, which he had formed for himself into an oratory, where away from the society of his parents and friends he could converse with God alone, and give vent to the love which consumed him. This affliction of total blindness, which came upon him in the flower of his age, would have driven most persons into despondency. Matteucci, on the contrary, guided by a higher light, beheld in it a

continual call to thanksgiving, for he regarded as a gift from a Father's hand what others would have looked upon as the chastisement of an angry Judge. "It was wonderful," says Father Aringhi, "with what constancy he bore this loss, thanking God for it as a sovereign benefit."

But to return: God who had destined him, though blind, to introduce the Oratory into his native place, began already by the sweet dispositions of His providence to prepare him for this undertaking. While Angelo was still a youth, his father Lorenzo sent him to live with two of his aunts, who were married and established at San Severino, a city of La Marca, seven miles distant from Camerino, where an Oratory already existed. On arriving at San Severino, his first care was to secure a good confessor, and God seconding his desires provided him with a person of great virtue, who was also gifted with the discernment of spirits. This director was Father Bartolomeo Achillei, who had been a familiar friend and disciple of S. Philip, and is mentioned in the saint's Life. He was at that time a priest of the Congregation of the Oratory of San Severino, of which he was the principal support, and he afterwards died with a great reputation of sanctity. Under so good a guide Matteucci made rapid and wonderful progress in perfection. In order however to remove every obstacle to his advancement, Angelo resolved to strip himself entirely of his own will, and to depend altogether upon his confessor. He accordingly from that

time forth, not only obeyed every command of his director, but he even avoided doing anything without first obtaining his permission; and the better to accomplish this, he was almost always at his side. In addition to his constant intercourse with Father Bartolomeo, the lofty maxims of Christian perfection which fell from the lips of this holy man, and which he had learned long since in S. Philip's school, were a perpetual incitement to Angelo. The life which he led corresponded to these instructions. Every evening he assembled in his room his uncle's family, and performed with them many devout exercises, of which the Litany of our Lady formed a daily part. When these devotions were over and the others had departed, Angelo continued alone in prayer, and he also frequently afflicted his innocent body with severe disciplines.

Meanwhile the disease in his eyes increased, causing him much pain, until at length he lost almost wholly the sight of both. To add to his sorrows his father and mother died about this time. His thoughts were now turned by the divine inspiration to the Congregation of the Oratory of San Severino, and he felt a strong desire to devote himself to God in it. He made known this wish to his director, begging him to mention it to the fathers, and to obtain from them his admission into the Congregation. Father Bartolomeo, well knowing Angelo's virtues and talents, considered that these amply compensated for his want of eyesight, and therefore readily laid the matter before the other fathers, upon

whom the decision depended. In what followed the overruling hand of Providence is very clearly discernible. The fathers were but little inclined to receive into their body one who was deprived of sight, for this defect is sufficient to render a person a burden to a community, no matter what his other merits may be. Such were the feelings with which they assembled in general congregation according to the rule of the Oratory; and yet when the votes were taken, he was elected by a large majority to the great astonishment of all, who were hardly able to conceive how their sentiments could have changed in so short a time, without apparently any new arguments having been brought forward. He was accordingly admitted into the Congregation A.D. 1587, when twenty-six years old.

Exemplary as Angelo's previous life had been, he gave no less edification to all when he was enrolled in the Congregation, and thus become a son of S. Philip. He was distinguished for his punctual observance of the rules and constitutions; for his blind obedience to the commands of superiors; for his uninterrupted application to mental prayer, in which he spent entire nights; for his patient endurance of blindness and sickness; and lastly for the devotion and preparation with which he received every morning the holy communion. Although the table of the Oratory was a frugal one, he observed an abstinence which was almost equal to a continued fast. "Such a zealous lover of penance was he," says Father Aringhi, "in spite of the innocence

of his life, that he observed a perpetual abstinence in regard to food; so that it might be said of him in the words of S. Jerome, that contenting himself with one egg and a few crumbs of bread a day, his food was an uninterrupted fast." Besides the usual disciplines which are taken in common three times a week in the Oratory, he scourged at other times also his emaciated body. He added vocal prayers to his long meditations, and he frequently recited the office of our Lord, or of the Blessed Virgin, or of the Dead, or the Rosary, or devout psalms and hymns, so that every moment of the day he was praising God either vocally or mentally.

Thus passed the two years which he spent in the Congregation of San Severino. At the end of this time, A.D. 1589, when he was twenty-eight years old, he was sent for to his native place, Camerino, by his uncle Francesco Matteucci. Francesco had been elected warden of a church built in honour of our Lady of the Prisons, in which a miraculous picture of her was kept. As he was exceedingly desirous to promote and extend devotion to our Blessed Lady, he bethought him of his nephew Angelo, with whose virtues he was well acquainted, and he tried in various ways to induce him to undertake the charge of this church. To the arguments of his uncle were added the express commands of his bishop, Mgr. Bovio. Angelo yielded therefore to these persuasions and consented to remain in his native city. The church to which he had been appointed, was not far from the city walls,

and he took up his abode there in company with Domenico Sebastiani, parish priest of S. Natoglia, whom he had known intimately from childhood. At the end of two years he was joined by D. Giuseppe Celidonio, a priest of Camerino, D. Antonio Rocchini, incumbent of the Cathedral, D. Giulio Cesare Tavolacci, and D. Giuseppe Bellini, all of whom were attracted to him by the fame of his virtues. While they were thus living together, it occurred to Angelo, who had imbibed the spirit of the Oratory at San Severino, that they might form themselves into a similar Congregation; and their church, dedicated to the Queen of Heaven, who was the principal Foundress of the Oratory, seemed well adapted for this purpose. Before however taking any steps in the matter, he thought it right to consult the fathers of the Roman Congregation, and by their advice, during the interval of two years between 1589, and October, 1591, he formed his companions into a Congregation after the pattern which he had learned at San Severino. He was assisted in the foundation by the Ven. Giovenale Ancina, who to escape the mitre forced on him by the Pope had taken refuge in the provinces of Umbria and La Marca. Father Angelo, succeeded at this time in attaching to the Congregation Sebastiano Grandi, a priest of great virtue, who after an absence of many years had lately returned to his native place, in the hopes of being cured of an obstinate fever under which he was labouring. He was a man of great learning and prudence, fervent in prayer and full of

zeal for the conversion of sinners, of fervent charity towards God, profuse in alms-giving and severe towards himself, mortifying his body with rigorous penances, and his intellect and will by the practice of the lowliest humility. To crown all, he was a familiar friend of the holy Patriarch S. Philip. He obtained the restoration of his health while praying before the picture of our Lady of the Prisons, to which he had paid a visit of devotion; and at length perceiving that he was a favourite with the fathers he yielded to the persuasions of Father Angelo and was admitted into the Congregation A.D. 1592.

Many other exemplary priests were received during the same year, and the new Congregation was unwearied in its labours for the salvation of souls, especially by means of sermons and the administration of the sacraments of penance and the eucharist. The fathers had not a moment which they could call their own, and after satisfying their own obligations, they devoted every hour of the day to the service of others. They were moreover entirely dependant for their support on the alms of the faithful, which they collected in Camerino and the neighbouring towns of La Marca. To their scanty fare and confined dwelling house they added not only the mortification and disciplines proper to the institute, but also a rigorous fast three days a week on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. This latter practice was afterwards laid aside by the advice of Father Angelo Velli, superior of the Roman Congregation, to whom

they had applied for exact information concerning the practices and customs of the Oratory at Rome. In a letter of Father Velli to them on this subject, he lays it down as a general rule, that they should not bind themselves to anything beyond what is enjoined by the precepts of the Church; since experience shows that the contrary is a great hinderance to other exercises of greater importance and proper to the Congregation.

But to resume our narrative: Father Angelo Matteucci, though only in minor orders, governed the Congregation of Camerino with the title of Rector, until Father Sebastiano Grandi was admitted into it. His humility led him then to resign to this father, as being a priest, the care of the priests and novices of the Congregation, and he confined himself solely to the internal management of the house, which office also he gave up A. D. 1596. The institute meanwhile was in great favour with the people of Camerino; and another church dedicated to our Lady of Lanciano, four miles distant from the city, was intrusted to the fathers, some of whom took up their abode in its neighbourhood. The devout people finding it difficult owing to the distance to satisfy their desires of hearing the fathers preach the word of God in that simple, but grave, familiar and nervous style, which is the characteristic of the Oratory, begged Father Angelo to establish himself and his companions within the city. At the same time the Confraternity of the Misericordia presented him

with the church of S. John the Baptist in Peschiera, to which a small house was attached. The father willingly accepted the church, and began the spiritual exercises there A. D. 1601. On July 15th of the following year the Congregation of Camerino, which had been previously approved by the bishop, was confirmed and established by a bull of Pope Clement VIII. Father Angelo, though still only in minor orders, was A. D. 1612 again elected superior of the Congregation. The labours which he had undergone were very great, for he used to go continually from one to the other of the three churches belonging to the Congregation, preaching first in one and then in another, and this too frequently on the same day. At length when he was made a second time superior, he determined to unite the Congregation at the church of S. John in Peschiera, and to give up the other two churches; for the multiplicity of Houses in the same town seemed to him out of harmony with the ancient usages of the Oratory.

This union of the fathers took place in 1612. The change however was the cause of great discomfort to them, for the house was mean and small. In the words of Father Mariano Medici, the inseparable companion of Matteucci, "For forty years it was impossible to make the house comfortable. God knows what was endured in that church. The fathers and brothers lodged in thebe ginning over the church, in two badly fitted rooms. Father Alberto Morichetti used often in winter time to find the snow lying on

his pillow." There were on chairs of any kind in the house, so that at recreation the fathers had to sit on bundles of vine branches which they had received as an alms, and this too even when strangers were present, though as sometimes happened they might be prelates or Cardinal Gherardi himself. They were also in the greatest want of money, for the little income which they had hitherto possessed was attached to the churches they had resigned, and they therefore lost it altogether. So great in fact were the straits to which they were reduced, that they could only support one lay-brother, named Simon, for the service of the church and house; and he though very pious was old and simple. He did not even know how to make the responses at mass. Father Angelo in consequence took this office upon himself, while the brother ministered the cruets and changed the missal, which Angelo's blindness prevented him from doing. Owing to Simon's age, it always fell to Father Angelo's lot to ring the bells. On one occasion also, when a small building was being erected, Father Angelo's humility led him to carry away the rubbish on his shoulders in a hod. Such were the hardships the fathers had to endure, while labouring so zealously for the salvation of others. God at length rewarded their confidence in Him, and gradually made provision for the support of the Congregation, until in course of time it reached its present respectable and honourable position.

Meanwhile Father Matteucci was unwearied in

preaching, for his blindness having rendered him unable to perform the other functions of the institute, he took upon himself almost the entire burden of delivering the spiritual discourses in the church and the Oratory. His sermons were remarkable for their great freedom from all human respect in censuring vices, coupled however with prudence and discretion. He had a particular gift from God of turning towards those persons among the audience who were addicted to the sins against which he was preaching; and blind though he was, he seemed to fix his eyes upon them, and address his discourse to them alone of his hearers. On one occasion, when he was preaching, a person present instead of listening began to talk and prevent the others from hearing, when the Servant of God, suddenly turning round to him, exclaimed, "Be silent, excommunicated man!" Father Angelo, though he knew nothing of the person, and could not see him, was right in what he said, for the man was actually under excommunication. In preaching on the Passion, to which he had been from his childhood very devout, Father Matteucci used to prolong his discourse to four or five hours' length, without failing either in thoughts or language; and such was the efficacy of his words, that he wrought both compunction and astonishment in his hearers. His zeal for the salvation of souls was so great, that he used frequently to preach in the neighbouring cities, repeatedly delivering three and four sermons a day. On arriving at a town he used to begin his first discourse by saying,

that he had not come there to eat or to drink, but to save their souls. Thus, like his Divine Master, his food and his drink seemed to be the conversion of sinners. He staid some time at Foligno, preaching every day in the Oratory founded there by Gio. Battista Vittelli, the dear disciple of S. Philip. His fame was so great, that he was invited by many monks and nuns, who could not attend his sermons, to preach to them in their churches. Father Angelo was most ready to satisfy their wishes, and besides his daily discourse in the Oratory, he delivered two or three sermons a day in different monasteries of nuns. He preached during the whole of Lent at S. Catherine's, which is the largest and most numerous of the convents, and by his burning words advanced them not a little in the paths of holiness.

At the same time that he was preaching perfection to these good mothers, he rooted out by his fervent exhortations the corruptions which existed in Foligno. He had heard with great sorrow that a feast was to be held at a certain place in the city, and that persons of both sexes were to assemble there for dancing and other dangerous amusements. The news inflamed Matteucci's zeal, and he took occasion in one of his discourses to inveigh with apostolic freedom against this abuse, threatening with the speedy vengeance of Heaven all those who in contempt of his admonitions should presume to attend. Some ladies however, putting no faith in his predictions, set out for the feast, when the weather becoming suddenly bad, their

carriage was upset, and they were taken up bruised and covered with mire. The event threw such a gloom over the company, that for fear of a worse disaster they gave up the representation of a comedy which they had prepared.

The devil, alarmed at the results of Matteucci's labours, did his utmost to destroy him, but he was saved by the interposition of Heaven. He was preaching one Lent in the parish of Aquacanina, which belongs to the territory of Camerino, and while walking about the house, he fell into a hole which there was in the floor of a room, and which his blindness had prevented him from seeing. He was in imminent danger of being killed, and it appeared to the people almost miraculous that he escaped with only a slight wound in one leg. What rendered the fatigues he underwent the more remarkable was the many severe illnesses which he had, and which were of such a nature that it seemed almost impossible that he could have strength to preach so much and at such length. Besides his blindness he suffered from acute pains in the stomach, which however were nothing compared to the palpitation of the heart under which he laboured during twenty-two years. Still in spite of all these severe infirmities he never failed to deliver a discourse every day at Vespers; so that it seemed as if the palpitation of his heart was like that of S. Philip's, which never hindered him also from preaching. As his age advanced and death approached, his illnesses became still more wonderful; for while on

ferial-days he lay in bed apparently in great danger, on Sundays and other festivals he used to get up as if he were well, and going to the church at the proper time, he made his usual sermon with the greatest satisfaction. He was so persevering in the ministry of the Word of God, that even after having received Extreme Unction he wished much to preach.

Amid all these labours and illnesses he did not neglect the government of the Congregation which he had founded, but paid diligent attention to everything that was necessary for its maintenance and growth. He took especial care of his children when they were ill, and though he made little account of his own maladies—so much so that many times he said nothing about them for several days, neither asking for or taking any remedy—yet whenever one of his sons was attacked by sickness he was continually in his room, and though blind he was most quick in anticipating all his wants. He was still more watchful in promoting the spiritual interests of his subjects, and well aware how needful exterior, and much more interior mortification is to the maintenance and growth of piety, he practised them exceedingly in both these points when he was superior and novice-master. He had not only learned this virtue from the life of the holy Father, but he practised it himself in so high and searching a degree, that he was most ingenious in devising ways of mortifying others both in words and deeds. He knew so well how to touch persons in the quick, as it is said, by his morti-

fications, that it almost seemed as if he read their interior. Sometimes for example when they were going to hold the usual evening Oratories in the church of San Venanzo, he used to order some of his children to carry on their shoulders like porters the benches for the audience, while he loaded others with the musical instruments which were to be used there. Again he bade some of them walk about in the most frequented squares of the city without their ferrajolos, and he told others to carry through the streets great vessels of water. In this way as opportunities offered he exercised them in a thousand different acts of searching mortification.

CHAPTER II.

MATTEUCCI PREDICTS HIS DECEASE; HIS LAST ILLNESS AND DEATH: THE HONOURS PAID HIM AT HIS BURIAL, AND THE ESTIMATION IN WHICH HE WAS HELD BY ALL.

A FEW days before Father Angelo was attacked by the fever of which he died, he happened to meet out of doors some devout women of his acquaintance. After saying to them a few short words about spiritual things, as was his way with persons of the other sex, he took his leave in these words, "Good bye, till we meet in Paradise." As the expressions were unusual for him, it was thought that he had used them

on purpose as a warning of his approaching death. In like manner meeting one day the notary who was to make his will, he told him that he should soon have need of him to arrange the settlement of his inheritance. About the same time a near female relation of his made an urgent request to be permitted to pay him a visit provided it was agreeable to him and the other fathers. He answered her that she need not trouble herself, for she would have no difficulty about seeing him next Sunday in church. His words were verified by the event, for he was on that day laid out in church on the bier. But he spoke more clearly and distinctly at the commencement of his last illness, and though it had no threatening symptoms, he foretold at once the time at which he should die. The physicians did not think much of the fever, and Father Venanzo Buglioni of the Congregation, on hearing this opinion which they had expressed, told Father Angelo that he must not think of going to Paradise so soon, but that he must labour a little longer and not desert so prematurely his beloved Congregation. Angelo however replied, that his labours were over; and when Father Venanzo repeated to him the statement of the physicians, he made the same answer; and soon after turning to Father Mariano Medici and some of his relations who were present, he told them that he should not reach the seventh day of the illness. It happened as he had said, for at the end of the sixth day he departed to a better life.

On February 2nd, 1629, the Feast of the Purification, notwithstanding his weakness, he went into church to preach a sermon in honour of his adorable Lady and Mother, and this was the last discourse he ever delivered. Next day he was seized with a violent cold, and though his sufferings were very great, he still refused to keep his bed. On the following morning, which was Sunday, in spite of the fever under which he laboured, he was very anxious to go down into the church and assist at the Divine Sacrifice. He yielded however to the commands of the physicians and the entreaties of the fathers, and remained in bed, on condition however that the holy Communion should be brought him in his room. Father Angelo, knowing that his time was at hand, proceeded to arrange his affairs with great prudence and that calmness of mind which never left him throughout his illness. The fulfilment of God's Will was the one desire of his heart. Hence when Father Venanzo Buglioni, after feeling his pulse that night, said to him sorrowfully, "Do you wish to leave us so soon?" he replied, "It is God's will;" and when others told him that his illness would not be serious, his only answer was, "God's will be done."

The perfect peace of conscience which he enjoyed was very remarkable, and must have arisen from his great innocence of life. For well aware as he was that in a few days he was to appear before the tribunal of God, though he communicated every morning, he only went to confession once during his illness, and then it was from a

desire to receive a general absolution for his whole life. Such was the angelic purity of his soul. His sickness in the meantime increased, and his pains became so intense, that his heart, as he described it, seemed to be splitting. At two o'clock on Thursday morning he received the Viaticum, and then entreated earnestly that he might be anointed with the holy oil: yet for fear of troubling the Father Superior, who had to anoint him, he put it off to a more seasonable time. When the Superior came to him he renewed his request, and though he did not appear to be in his extremity, he begged so earnestly for this holy Sacrament that his wishes were at last granted him. Although he was suffering acute pain, he recited the Confiteor and made the responses to the prayers; and the hearts of all present were touched by his attention and devotion. The Father Superior was so much overcome by emotion, that when asked by the dying man to make the commendation of his soul, he declined, not trusting himself to speak. At length overcome by Father Angelo's entreaties, the Superior recited the prayers, intermingling them with tears and sobs. Father Angelo was desirous of obtaining his bishop's blessing in his extremity. It was brought him by his confessor, as the bishop himself was too unwell to visit him. But while Angelo in his last moments thus sought the blessing of his pastor, his children in the Congregation were no less anxious to be blessed by him. The Father Superior, who was at once his son and father, made known to him their

desires, and after a long contest with his humility, he yielded at last to obedience, and gave them his benediction as they knelt round his bed, saying these words: "May the Father, the Son and the Holy Ghost, bless you."

When the news of Matteucci's danger spread through the city, people crowded to the house of the Oratory, in order to see him before he died, and to commend themselves to his prayers. Religious, secular priests and other devout persons vied with each other to visit him; and he gave each of them advice suitable to his state. From Thursday morning until eight o'clock in the evening both his room and the house were full of devout people who had come for his blessing and prayers, and he promised readily to pray for them to God, speaking as though he were sure of Paradise. Mingled with this confidence, he confessed himself with the deepest humility to be the greatest sinner in the world, and he entreated the bystanders to aid him with their prayers. Once when the Father Guardian of the Capuchins reminded him of those sweet words so often used by his Seraphic Father, "My God and my All," Angelo, as esteeming himself unworthy to utter them, replied with the penitent prophet, "Remember not, O Lord, the sins of my youth: have pity on me, O God: be propitious to me a sinner." He trusted so little to himself that he desired to have a priest on either side of him to hold his hands in theirs. And in this position he remained until he expired, held by those sacred hands which besides

the holy anointing they had received, constantly touched Christ Himself in the Sacrament.

The pain which he endured was so severe that his heart seemed to him, as he said, to be pierced with swords and arrows, so that he could scarcely help crying out on account of it. Still with all this he had such mastery over himself, that the only sound which came from his lips was an oppressed breathing. He had begged the Father Guardian of the Capuchins to assist him in his agony, from the great devotion he had ever borne to the seraphic patriarch. The good father, seeing how bitter were his pains, exhorted him to pray to the Divine mercy for some alleviation of them; but the dying man only shook his head at this advice, thus showing the greatness of his patience and his desire to suffer even to his last breath for the love of his Lord. He consoled himself amid his tortures by the remembrance of what his crucified Lord had suffered for him, and from the time he received Extreme Unction he asked the confessor of the house, and when he was engaged he begged of others to read to him the Passion. When some one fearing that his head would be tired by the length of the reading wished to stop, he begged of him to continue, declaring that he derived from it the greatest consolation. The truth of this was apparent on looking at him; for great as was his pain, it seemed from the devout attention with which he listened to the narrative of the Passion, that the thought of our Lord's sufferings made him almost forget his own. When the reader

had reached the words in the Gospel "on the next day," where the description of the Passion terminates, and the Evangelist goes on to tell of the taking down from the cross and the burial, he stopped reading; but the dying old man begged him to continue the few remaining verses, saying that this would be a great consolation to him.

The following day, being Friday, February 9th, 1629, about eight in the morning, Father Angelo calmly expired at the age of sixty-eight, amid the tears of his children; and thus was accomplished the prayer which he had so many times uttered during his life, and especially in his last illness, "I desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ." The Bishop of Camerino, Mgr. Emilio Altieri, afterwards Pope Clement X. was present at his death, and made the commendation of his soul. After Father Angelo's death his soul was seen by a very holy person ascending up to heaven like a radiant star, as has happened in the case of many saints. This circumstance is related by Father Aringhi in his book Triumphus Pœnitentiæ. On Saturday, the body dressed in a black cassock and surplice was placed on a bier in the church. The people flocked in great crowds to kiss his hands, to touch him with their rosaries and to cut off pieces of his dress or hair. The body remained there at the request of the magistrates all the following Sunday, to satisfy the devotion of the people.

Many cures were wrought by his intercession.

Among other remarkable things which took place, a person who entertained an envenomed hatred against another man, who was also in the church, on approaching to kiss Angelo's hand, heard an interior voice saying, "Forgive, my son, forgive." He felt at the same time his hatred pass away, and under a strong impulse he went up to his enemy, and made friends with him on the spot. The fathers were in doubt in what place to bury the corpse, for the community vault was filled with water, and at last they fixed on a spot near the epistle side of an altar dedicated to the Blessed Virgin, where Angelo most loved to pray while he was alive. They thus fulfilled a prediction which he had made while alive concerning the place of his burial. Many votive tablets were soon hung up there in memory of graces received through Angelo's intercession; but they were immediately removed by the fathers in obedience to the orders of the Holy See. This devotion in the people and their own personal knowledge of his virtues at length determined them, in general congregation, to request the bishop that the necessary processes might be drawn up.

Such was the death of Father Angelo, a man who, in the words of his familiar friend, Father Mariano Medici, "was held in universal veneration by the whole city of Camerino, and who had so great a gift of consoling the afflicted, that every one who commended himself to his prayers or went to him in distress came away comforted."

CHAPTER III.

MATTEUCCI'S FERVENT CHARITY; HIS DEVOTION TO GOD AND THE MOST HOLY VIRGIN; AND THE GREAT LOVE HE BORE HIS NEIGHBOUR.

Like a true son of S. Philip, Matteucci was most ingenious in concealing his virtues and especially his charity; but nevertheless it was perpetually breaking forth in his words, and in the touching discourses which he delivered in praise of this virtue. Hence he used frequently to expatiate on the precept, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart and thy whole soul and thy whole mind." Sometimes again to inflame the hearts of his hearers with the love of God, he represented to them in lively colours God's love for us, and he dwelt often on those words of S. John, "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son." Now since all Angelo's happiness consisted in loving God, he was unable to understand how men could find pleasure in offending Him, and he often broke out into such exclamations as these, "O God, they seem to find it difficult to be happy without offending Thee; but what greater joy can there be than that which the servants of God possess? O dear souls! what happiness can you find in sin, and who can possibly be joyful if he is in sin? Ah, it is no happiness but an unceasing

torment not to love God and to offend Him; what else are those alarms and terrors of conscience but so many serpents which gnaw the wretched soul?" At other times unable to persuade himself that so good a God could be the butt of His sinning creatures, he cried out, "Oh! that a God so good should be outraged by such sins; and that a God who can only do what is good should not be loved! Oh! how ungrateful they are who obey Him not!"

As Angelo grew in charity and love towards God, he changed his tone in speaking; for feeling that he would himself rather lose ten thousand lives than offend His Lord, he refused to believe that any one could be found capable of sinning against Him. Hence he no longer willingly spoke against sins and man's ingratitude, but he preferred to preach about the love of God, desiring to win souls by love rather than fear. Moreover knowing that true love shows itself in deeds rather than in words, he sought to devote himself wholly to his Lord's service, and as a partial reparation for the offences of sinners, he endeavoured to induce men by every means in his power to render to God the honour and obedience which is due to Him.

Angelo was most devout to the blessed Sacrament, and he laboured to instil the same sentiments into others. From his earliest years, as has been related, he used to communicate daily, and he continued this practice till his death. When his confessor to try him sometimes forbade him to approach the holy table, his soul seemed to

languish with longing desire for the blessed Sacrament. Still for all this he abandoned himself entirely to the will of his spiritual guide; but except this one case there was no inconvenience or fatigue sufficient to keep him from communion. He also did his best to inflame others with a like hunger for this heavenly Food, and he was continually exhorting those who came to see him to frequent the sacraments of confession and the eucharist. He omitted no opportunity of urging priests to offer daily the Divine Sacrifice, and as at that time men were but too negligent of this duty, it may be said that Matteucci by his incessant exhortations restored the frequent use of the sacraments in his country. Great as was his hunger for the Bread of Angels, the external homage which he paid his Lord in the Blessed Sacrament was not inferior to it. He used to spend not hours only but whole days prostrate before the Divine Majesty hidden beneath the Eucharistic veils, and he sought no less earnestly to inspire others with the same devotion. To make reparation for the offences committed during the carnival, and to draw away his fellow citizens from this dangerous amusement, he introduced the solemn exposition of the Quarant'ore in the Church of the Oratory, during the last three days of Quinquagesima. He followed in this the pattern set some time before by the fathers of the Oratory at Naples, which had been imitated by all the other churches in that city, as well as in other places. In order that the exposition of

the Blessed Sacrament might take place with as much splendour as possible, he caused theatres to be erected, on which were represented various events related in Scripture prefiguring this great mystery. These measures were not without the desired effect, for the people of Camerino and its neighbourhood, abandoning the diversions of the carnival, flocked in multitudes to adore their Lord in the Blessed Sacrament, and great numbers of them went to communion during these three days.

The Servant of God was not able to be ordained priest on account of his blindness, but he was never tired of assisting at the holy Sacrifice. As soon as the bell sounded which announced that the first mass would begin, he went into the Church, and remained there until the last one was finished. If by chance a strange priest had said mass before the usual time, he complained gently to the sacristan that he had not told him of it, for he thought no loss equal to that of missing this holy function. Although he rejoiced in being tried by God with various illnesses, he disliked much being attacked by fainting fits, because they obliged him to leave the Church, and thus lose the Divine Sacrifice. To remedy this as far as possible, he provided himself with some little stools of rough wood, to lean his arms upon, and these are preserved in memory of him to the present day. He also omitted assisting at mass during the time of the sermons in Lent and Advent, from the desire he had of hearing the Word of God.

Another great proof of his love was the continual remembrance which he carried about with him of his crucified Lord. From his earliest years to the end of his life his thoughts were continually upon the Passion, and it formed the most frequent subject of his meditations. Although blind, he would not be without a crucifix in his private Oratory, and he spent many hours on his knees before it. Wonderful was the eloquence with which he spoke of our Lord's sufferings. The sermons which he made when a child were principally concerning them, and in after life thoughts and words never failed him when discoursing on the Passion. On one occasion while preaching to the nuns of San Severino, he continued speaking uninterruptedly for full five hours on this mystery. To follow in suffering his afflicted Lord he made a vow to fast all the Fridays in the year, which he faithfully observed until owing to his frequent illnesses he obtained a commutation of the vow in obedience to the commands of his superiors. Still he made up for the fast by his ingenuity in mortifying his palate, and he often concealed the most delicate morsels in his napkin or on the plate.

Angelo's love of our Lord was accompanied by a great devotion to His Blessed Mother. So tender and devout a lover of Mary was he that he seemed to have obtained in heritage his holy Father S. Philip's filial tenderness towards Her. Often in imitation of the saint, he used to call Her "My mamma, my dear mamma;" and turning to Her, he used frequently to say, "Be Thou my

mother; I have no mother but Thee." In uttering the sweet name of Mary he felt an ineffable delight. He longed to extend Her worship and to preach Her glories: many were his sermons in praise of the Queen of Paradise, and when on Her festivals it was not his turn to preach in church, he gladly exchanged with the preacher that he might have this opportunity of celebrating his beloved mother, and imprinting on the hearts of all a filial devotion to Her. Though he was able to discourse eloquently without preparation on any subject, he used to begin to collect matter for his sermons fifteen or twenty days beforehand, when he was going to preach on one of Her festivals. Our Lady rewarded the loving attention of her servant and son, by disposing that his last sermon should be on the Feast of the Purification in Her praise. Matteucci's devotion to the Blessed Virgin was also evidenced by his frequent visits to the house in which She dwelt while alive. Blind though he was, he often went on foot from Camerino to Loreto to venerate that holy sanctuary, and the fatigues of the journey were fully repaid by the delights he enjoyed in meditating on the august mysteries which had been accomplished within that little dwelling.

The love which Angelo bore to God and his blessed Mother, extended to all the inhabitants of heaven. Among the angels he was especially devout to S. Michael, on whose feast he was born, and to his guardian angel. Of the saints he had a particular devotion to the holy forerunner of Christ, S. John the Baptist, to whom

the church of the Congregation was dedicated. He had also a great affection for the holy family of our Saviour, namely, his supposed father S. Joseph, and his Mother's parents, S. Joachin, and S. Anne. The seraphic S. Francis of Assisi, on whose feast he had been baptised, was on this account very dear to him. But it would be impossible to describe his tender and filial love for his blessed Father S. Philip. To use the expression of Father Mariano Medici, his intimate friend, "any one, or rather no one can imagine it." As a proof of the intensity of his love, it has been recorded by Father Mariano, that once when he preached on the saint's feast day about his glories, he was unable at first to say a word for weeping.

He used to call prayer the forge of the love of God. In his childhood, as has been said, he spent much of his time in churches. Afterwards when he became a son of the Oratory and then father and founder of the Congregation of Camerino, besides the community exercises, prayer and contemplation were his continual employment, so that it might be said of him like S. Philip that his life was one uninterrupted prayer. Still he had fixed hours for this duty which nothing but obedience could induce him to neglect. Not content with giving the whole day to prayer, he spent his nights also in devotion. He used to say that the prayers made in public during the day serve to edify others, but that the best time to converse alone with God was the night. Hence in the evening when all

had retired to rest, he used to steal down into the church to pray. His infernal foes however, jealous of his employing his nights so well, sought in various ways to disturb him. Once while he was praying as usual in the church, the devil came to him under the form of one of the fathers, and sharply reprehended him for spending in this way the hours alloted to repose, and accusing him of acting thus in disobedience to his superiors, advised him to retire to his own room. Father Angelo believing that it really was one of the fathers, on hearing the mere word obedience, humbly replied, "Go, my son, and I will follow you." The proud spirit inflamed with fury at the ready obedience of Matteucci, no less than at his long continued prayers, immediately discovered himself, and seizing the father by the shoulder, dragged him violently to the church door. This evil spirit was afterwards compelled, despite himself, to reveal his artifice and ignonominious failure, at the exorcising of a possessed person in the church of our Lady of Caspiano in the territory of Camerino. The event would never otherwise have been known, for Matteucci had not mentioned it to any one. His confidence in prayer was so great, that he would never undertake anything either for himself or others without first consulting God in prayer. Hence whenever any business came before him, he used to say, "Let us pray about it," thus implying that nothing could turn out well which was not first commended to God with earnest and humble prayers. Although

blind, he recited daily with the help of a companion the canonical hours, repeating all that he knew of them by heart. Besides this he said every day the offices of the Blessed Virgin, of the Dead and of the Holy Spirit, as also the rosary and other beads. Wherever he was, whether walking or seated, in his room or in church, or on a journey, he was always praying. Moreover fully convinced by his own experience how much prayer inflames the soul with the love of God, he sought both in public and private discourses to urge upon others this holy exercise.

As women are not allowed by the rules of the institute to attend the exercises of the Oratory, he advised them to share in these devotions by retiring to some remote part of their houses for prayer, when the church bell gave notice that the public Oratory was about to begin. As this devout practice was very widely spread through Camerino, Father Angelo took the greatest pains that the bell should ring punctually at the hour fixed, in order that not a moment of the time allotted to this exercise might be lost. The reading of holy books was another of the means used by Father Matteucci to inflame his love of God. It was an old custom of his to rise two hours before day-break for spiritual reading and to prepare his sermons, and as he could not read to himself on account of his blindness, he used to beg one of the fathers to perform this charitable office for him. Father Girolamo Fattorini was one of those who read to him, and Angelo to save him the trouble of

rising from his bed, was in the habit of bringing him the book as well as a candle, which he had first lit at the lamp in the church. The books which he took most delight in were the Lives of the Saints, especially of those who had undergone the greatest labours and persecutions for the love of God.

The virtue of hope, and filial confidence in the Divine goodness grew out of his ardent love. At the point of death, when even Saints tremble, he united to the holy fear of God so firm a hope of obtaining Paradise, that it seemed as though he already possessed it. Matteucci's trust in God was so great, that in temporal, no less than in spiritual necessities he looked to heaven alone for help, nor was his confidence in Divine Providence disappointed, either as regarded himself or his newly established Congregation. As an instance of this it has been recorded that in the early times of the Congregation, when they were labouring under extreme poverty, one day word was brought to the servant of God and the other fathers while at table, that there was no oil in the house with which to season the vegetables of which they were about to partake. Father Angelo immediately putting his confidence in God, directed that they should be served up as they were; when on a sudden a knock was heard at the door, and to their surprise a man entered bearing on his back a vessel of oil for their use. On another occasion a present of some pigeons had been made to the house, and Angelo gave orders that they should be

distributed one by one among the fathers. He was answered that this was impossible, as there was a bird too few. Father Angelo however persisted in directing that one should be given to each father. At the same moment a pigeon entered the open window of a room in which some of the fathers happened to be, and as after diligent inquiry the bird appeared to belong to no one in the city, it was judged that God had sent it them in fulfilment of Matteucci's desire.

S. Augustine says, that it is a lame love which has not both God and our neighbour for its object. "Noli esse claudus, duo pedes sunt duo amores Dei et proximi." Angelo certainly did not fail in love to others, for his whole life was spent in labours for the salvation of souls. Being unable from his blindness to serve them as a priest, he devoted himself entirely to preaching, and though old and worn with illness, he never once flagged in his exertions. The many fatiguing journeys which he undertook in spite of his bad health are an evidence of his zeal. He made so much account of one soul, that he would have gladly employed on it labours sufficient to convert a nation. Though the people usually flocked in numbers to hear Matteucci, it happened sometimes on a week-day that he had but a small audience; and yet he took as much pains with his discourse at these times as if he had been likely to have a great many hearers. Once when one of the fathers remarking this, advised him not to put himself to so much trouble, and quoted the words, "Pour not forth thy

discourse when it is not heard," he replied, that our Lord had preached to one Samaritan woman, and that to convert her "though fatigued with his journey," He, as the Gospel relates, "sat down beside the well."

As another proof of his burning love for souls, it is related that he used frequently while preaching to cry out with the most touching earnestness: "O dearest souls, souls ransomed by the most precious blood of Christ!" Father Matteucci, knowing how easily the young fall away and plunge deeper and deeper into sin, entreated the masters both of the public and private schools to send their pupils to him once every week, and the better to insure this, he made use of the authority of the bishop with them. Friday was the day he chose for this purpose; and after some spiritual book had been read to them for a short time in the church, he addressed them with a face full of zeal and paternal love on the horrid nature of sin and the need of avoiding it, dwelling often on those words of Wisdom, "Fly from sin, as from the face of a serpent." He explained to those who were of a more tender age the beauty of a soul robed in baptismal innocence, and urged them to spare no efforts to preserve it. When the sermon was ended they all ran to him, contending with each other to kiss his hand. He endeavoured to instil into all the young who came across him hatred of sin and the love of virtue and sanctity, and he was never weary of repeating to them with the most engaging gentleness, "Be holy, be holy." Not being

able to labour as a priest in the confessional, he endeavoured to make up for it by animating others, and especially parish priests, to be indefatigable in this duty; and that the fatigues which it involves might become not only supportable but sweet to them, he showed them how great a work of charity this employment is. He advised them however not to let charity degenerate into a fault by allowing women to mingle extraneous matter with the confession of their sins, for that true charity consisted in hearing only what was necessary to the due administration of the sacrament. He gave the same counsel to women also, and he recommended a certain lady who was rather long in her confessions, not to say more than that she had committed such and such faults.

Matteucci had a tender compassion for the temporal wants of his neighbour, and he gave frequent and large alms to the poor. Like his holy Father S. Philip, the necessities of poor artists especially touched his heart, and he paid them for their labours not only amply, but superabundantly. When he bought anything for himself, instead of trying to beat down the price, he gave them something in addition, and he used often to say, "You ask me less than what it costs you." His heart melted with tenderness for the poor who were sick, and besides comforting and encouraging them, he endeavoured to assist them to the extent of his ability. Hence he was frequently sent for from all parts of the city to visit the sick, both on account of the con-

solation they received from his words, and because they hoped to recover their health by his means. At these times he was perplexed between his charity and humility, and he used sometimes to reply, "What do they want me for; they should send for a physician." Thus it was that the humble servant of God answered when he perceived that they had asked for him in the hope that his presence would cure them. The other fathers knowing well the reason why he was sent for, once said to him in jest, that he must take care not to have vain-glory, but he replied to them in a serious tone, that by the grace of God he had never had to confess any sin of vain-glory.

CHAPTER IV.

OF THE OTHER VIRTUES OF FATHER ANGELO MATTEUCCI.

Father Angelo's humility was such that, like S. Francis of Assisi, he esteemed himself the greatest sinner in the world. He often expressed his astonishment that his fellow citizens had not thrown him headlong from their walls, or loaded him with stripes as a punishment for his misdeeds; and this he said with so much humility that it was evident he spoke from the heart. Looking on himself in this light, he continually recommended himself to the prayers of others, that they might intercede for him with the Divine Mercy. His life was a tissue of acts of the

most exalted virtue, but yet so ingenious was his humility that he concealed very many of them even from the eyes of those who lived with him. Although gifted with great illumination in spiritual things, he was very cautious in speaking about them, for fear of rooting more firmly in men's minds the high esteem in which they held him. Notwithstanding that he was Founder of the Congregation, and actually Superior, he was most reserved and moderate in giving orders, and he avoided all authoritative words and the air of a Superior, simply saying, "Be so kind as to do this, if you have no objection," or other such expressions. Whenever he fancied that he had given annoyance by his words to any one of his brethren, he could not go to bed that night until he had visited the other's room and humbly asked pardon for his offence. In matters of business he preferred following the opinion of others to his own. He frequently exercised himself in acts of humility, in order to root this virtue more deeply in his soul. Thus he used to sweep out as well as he could the brothers' rooms, and clean the house, and as he was blind, he was obliged while doing this to feel his way about with his hands. Lastly to inflame others with humility, he often repeated those words of Christ with the paraphrase of St. Augustine: "Learn from Me, not to make a world, &c., but that I am meek and humble of heart." He used to say, "He who is humble is holy; he who is more humble is more holy; he who is most humble is most holy."

While Father Angelo subjected his soul by the practice of humility, he gained the dominion over his body by mortification. His disciplines were most severe, and the walls of the places in which he scourged himself were dyed with his blood. When his physicians strictly forbade him to discipline his enfeebled body, he used to pinch himself severely in the arms; and this he did on those days especially when the fathers of the Oratory are ordered by the rule to take the discipline. One of the fathers having remarked this ingenious penance, mentioned it in jest at the public recreation, and the servant of God, skilful though he was in concealing his virtues, could not deny the truth of it. He bound himself by vow to fast every Friday throughout the year, and he practised other mortifications in the refectory, leaving untouched the most delicate parts of the dishes set before him. His usual diet was so slender that it seemed to many insufficient to support life; for he generally contented himself with only the yolk of an egg. In fact, his bowels were preternaturally contracted, owing to his great abstinence, as the physicians declared on opening his body after death. Like a second S. Bernard, the bell which summoned the fathers to the refectory was so disagreeable to him, that each stroke, as he declared, seemed to inflict a blow upon him. What took place in the streets of Rome between his holy Father S. Philip and S. Felix of Cantalice the Capuchin, was repeated at Camerino; for Father Angelo meeting one day a friar of the same order, who was carrying

a large vessel of liquid, put his lips to it publicly, not so much to satisfy his thirst as his longing for mortifications.

His sleep was scanty and restless, and he used generally to get up two hours before day-break, although he had spent great part of the night praying in the church. He was so deeply penetrated with a sense of the importance of mortification and its peculiar obligation upon the sons of S. Philip, that when he was superior and novice-master he not only urged this virtue upon his subjects, but he himself practised them in it, by imposing on them things repugnant to their sense and reason. He frequently impressed upon all, both in his public and private discourses, the duty of mortifying the sight, since the preservation of purity greatly depends upon it. Although his blindness exempted him from all danger on this score, the servant of God used always to go with his face modestly cast down, and as opportunity offered he often observed, that if he though blind acted thus, how much more needful was it for others who had sight to keep their eyes fixed upon the ground.

What has just been said is an evidence of Angelo's exceeding purity, and in fact, all those who knew him bore testimony that from his childhood upwards they had never seen anything reprehensible in his life. Among others the priest Domenico Sebastiani, mentioned above, who lived with him in his father's house from his earliest years, bore witness that the servant of God would never allow any one, even of his

own family, to say or do anything contrary to the most delicate modesty, and that he could not endure to hear even a light expression. The following is a still greater proof of his virginal modesty. Angelo had a sister of no ordinary beauty, and it was observed that during the time he lived with her as a boy in his father's house, before losing the use of his eyes, he never ventured either at table or elsewhere to look her in the face. After Angelo had become blind, whenever he conversed with women, he used to imagine them to himself as so many dead men's skulls, that their presence instead of being a temptation might inspire him with horror. He was often heard to affirm that he should expect to drop down dead, if he entertained a particular affection for any one. For the same reason he desired others, and particularly religious and confessors, to cut off those little affectionate feelings which are frequently nourished under the semblance of good. He recommended them also to avoid long conversations with women, and not to visit them in their houses even for the purpose of preaching to them. He seldom discoursed so movingly as upon the subject of purity and its opposite vice. In preaching to nuns he loved to dilate on this virtue which so especially becomes those who have vowed themselves to a heavenly spouse. He held impurity in peculiar abhorrence, and it was said that if he had known of a single mortal sin being committed in the house where he was staying, he would have left it immediately. God testified to the purity of his soul by causing his vir-

ginal body frequently to emit a fragrant odour. This was affirmed by many persons who to their great astonishment perceived it in approaching him. One person especially who had come to him while ill in bed under the apprehension of being possessed, declared that he was not only consoled and set free from his alarm, but that the father's body, his bed, and the whole room seemed to be full of a most agreeable fragrance.

Matteucci's detachment from property and all earthly things, was as complete as if his whole possessions were in heaven. He not only refused in his youth the offer of ecclesiastical revenues and a canonry, but he renounced even his paternal inheritance. He obtained indeed from his uncle a benefice of eighty crowns, but it was for Father Sebastiano Grande, that he might support an uncle of his who was in want. The little which he possessed seemed to belong to others rather than himself. If he had lent anything, as a book for example, and afterwards had need of it himself, he used humbly to ask the person who had borrowed it to lend it him for a time, just as if he had lost all right over it. Once when some money was owing to him, and the payment was delayed, he could not be induced to take legal proceedings against his debtor, preferring to suffer the want of it himself, rather than to put others to any inconvenience. Although he loved the Congregation which he had founded with a deep and heartfelt affection, he was not solicitous about increasing its revenues. On one occasion he very earnestly exhorted the

fathers not to accept a legacy which had been left them, saying that in the time of their poverty they had never wanted for anything, and that when an excessive attention was paid to accumulating property, the love of God falls to the ground.

The continual sicknesses of the servant of God, the deaths of his relations, and the misfortunes which happened to his family gave abundant scope for the exercise of his patience. He was blind of both eyes; and yet he made so little account of this cross, that when a religious once told him that he would ask of S. Anthony of Padua for the restoration of his sight, Father Angelo with generous constancy quickly replied, that he in that case should betake himself to the Queen of Heaven to prevent the favour being granted him. Besides his blindness he laboured under pains in the stomach, dizziness, swoonings, swellings in the feet and legs, and lastly a violent and obstinate palpitation of the heart, which lasted twenty-two years, and caused him such agony that his other sufferings compared with it were mere child's play. His patience amid all these pains was invincible; neither by words or deeds did he give any sign of annoyance or weariness. They could not draw from him one sigh, but he resigned himself entirely into God's hands with a peace and calmness which nothing could overpower. If in addition to these sufferings he was attacked by some new malady, he told no one about it, unless extreme necessity compelled him. Once when he was going to preach

at a distance from Camerino, the motion of travelling caused sores to be formed in many parts of his body, which from his illnesses and rigorous abstinence was little better than a living skeleton; yet he never said a word to the brother who accompanied him, until the torture became so intolerable that he could no longer conceal it. God however alleviated his painful infirmities by celestial favours. At one time when his stomach was unable to retain any food, and the Fathers had repeatedly asked him whether there was anything which he could fancy, he at last answered that he might perhaps be able to eat a little partridge. They were not able however to procure any at the moment; but the next morning one of the brothers on entering the kitchen, was surprised to see a partridge fluttering about which had come down into the room through the chimney. After making inquiries through the town they could not hear of any one to whom the bird belonged, and so it seemed that God had sent it for the relief of his sick servant, as He had done formerly to S. Thomas Aquinas with regard to some fish when the saint was in a similar necessity. On another occasion also Father Angelo happened to express a desire for a pigeon, but as the bird was then out of season it could not have been procured without the greatest difficulty. God however again made provision for His servant by causing a live pigeon to fall unexpectedly at the feet of the fathers, as they were passing beneath the cathedral tower

on their usual journey to the little Oratory of S. Venanzo.

Father Matteucci gave another proof of his patience by the composure with which he heard the news of the sudden death of his brother, after he had learned that there had been time for him to receive the last sacraments. The other fathers, amazed at his calmness, asked him whether he did not feel distressed by the intelligence; but the servant of God answered that he should have felt it deeply if his brother had died without confession and communion, as it was however, his death did not cause him the slightest disquietude. He bore with the same patience the deaths of other near relations. He was so well prepared for such losses, that he used to say that supposing his father had been alive, and some one were to assassinate him, it would not cause him the slightest agitation, but that he would immediately cast himself at the feet of the murderer and humbly ask his pardon. He once experienced a violent interior conflict on account of a misfortune which befel his family, but he betook himself to prayer and in this way came off victorious. As is usual with the blind, he was of an apprehensive temperament, and hence on this occasion when his family had suffered greatly in their property by losing a lawsuit, he felt at first slightly disturbed by it. On perceiving it however, he went immediately to the church to ask aid from God, and he persevered for many hours in prayer during three days. He at length gained the mastery over his lower nature, and he

further drew from this interior combat a means of humiliation, for meeting one of the fathers as he was going down into the church he told him the reason of his prolonged prayers, adding, "You see what an unspiritual man I am: I have been troubled for three days about the loss of this property."

Not content with his actual sufferings, he was always eager to undergo something more for his Lord. One evening when they were talking about what each one would most desire to have, the servant of God answered, that for his part it would give him the greatest pleasure if some day they should have nothing to eat or drink in the house, and be obliged to go to bed fasting. Though this desire was never entirely fulfilled, still Matteucci had opportunities enough of showing his patience in the necessities which he had to encounter, for he was sometimes without even a half-penny, and yet he always bore his poverty with a smiling and cheerful countenance. In the journeys which he undertook for the glory of God, he repeatedly had to lodge in very poor and incommodious places. During the early part of his life, when he used to go from San Severino to his native city, he seldom stopped at his father's house, where he would have enjoyed every comfort, but he preferred staying at the convent of the Capuchins or of the Conventual Friars to share with them their poverty. He loved adversities so much that when difficulties did not arise about anything in which he was engaged, he feared much that the business was not

pleasing to God. At the time they were deliberating about undertaking the care of the church of S. John in Peschiera, far from being damped by the many contradictions and hinderances which arose, he was all the more eager to bring the matter to a conclusion; and he said that if there had been no difficulties in the way, it would have been a sign from God not to proceed with the affair.

He took a particular pleasure in hearing the lives of those Saints read who had suffered most for God. He frequently preached upon the blessings of suffering, and the fruit which comes of it, and in visiting the sick or other distressed persons, he used to animate their courage, bidding them bear their crosses willingly for the love of Jesus. Matteucci crowned all his virtues by unremitting perseverance in well-doing. He bore the yoke of God's law from his youth upwards, and increased daily in holiness until his death. The virtues which he sought to acquire, and the devotions which he undertook were not mere transitory efforts. He was constant in the study of Holy Scripture, in prayer and in preaching. He did not spend a moment in idleness, but devoted all his time to the acquisition and practice of the highest virtues. His continual advice to the young, who were leading virtuous lives, was to persevere in good; and he had reason to be thus urgent, for many begin well, but few persevere to the end. The principal means which he recommended them for obtaining perseverance was the frequentation of the holy Sacraments.

CHAPTER V.

THE GIFTS WHICH GOD COMMUNICATED TO FATHER ANGELO, AND THE MANY GRACES WHICH WERE OBTAINED THROUGH HIS INTERCESSION.

Father Matteucci was remarkable for a great gift of prophecy, and "though blind," as Father Aringhi says, "he saw and spoke of things absent as though they were present." The following are instances of this gift. Alfiero Pucioni was attacked by erisypelas in the arm, accompanied by a slight fever, and though the physicians did not think the illness of any consequence, his wife knowing Father Angelo's charity, begged him to visit her husband. He had no sooner approached the sick man's bed, than he exhorted him to conform himself to the Divine Will, and to set his conscience in order with his confessor. After leaving the room, he with unusual earnestness advised Alfiero's relations to have the sacraments of confession and communion administered to him, and not content with this, he sent Father Mariano Medici the next morning to see whether his recommendations had been followed. Soon afterwards the sick man died, contrary to the prognostications of the physicians.

The governor of the city of Camerino, Mgr. Accoramboni, a prelate who was in the full vigour of life, having fallen ill, Father Angelo visited

him, and being asked what he thought of the sickness, he answered immediately that the prelate was not long for this world. In the course of the illness, Mgr. Accoramboni became so much better that there seemed almost a certainty of his recovery. Matteucci however on hearing this did not alter his judgment, which was before long verified by the event. Ottavio Pericoli's wife and mother were both ill at the same time. Father Angelo visited them, and predicted the death of the former and the recovery of the latter; and so it happened, though judging from their respective ages, the contrary might have been naturally expected. The Cavaliere Ferranti Ferricioli received news that his son Francesco, who was governor of a place in the Roman Campagna, was dangerously ill. Ferranti went to ask Matteucci for his prayers and advice, as to whether it would be expedient to bring his son to Camerino, for the seriousness of his illness made the attempt appear hazardous. Father Angelo recommended him to go, for that although the journey there would be a disastrous one, he would return without accident, and his son be perfectly cured. Every word of the prediction came true; for in going the litter several times narrowly escaped being upset, while on the contrary, the return journey was most prosperous, and the sick man soon recovered his health in his native air.

Matteucci had also the gift of reading the secrets of men's hearts. He foresaw that the priest Ottaviano Monaldi, who lived some time in the

Congregation, would not persevere in it. Once when Monaldi, desiring to be present at a marriage which was to take place in a village near Camerino, asked permission of the servant of God to leave the house, but without specifying the object of his journey, Father Angelo refused the request as an improper one, saying, "You wish to go to a marriage." The priest was greatly astonished at this, for he had not spoken of the invitation to any one. The same person, having resolved by himself, without mentioning it to others, to become a Capuchin, asked Matteucci over and over again for leave to go to their monastery, but without declaring his reason. The Servant of God always refused him, until at length, overcome by his importunities, he said distinctly to him, "You want to be a Capuchin, and it is a temptation of the devil, who wishes to withdraw you from your labours in the confessional, that after becoming a Capuchin you may be neither one thing nor the other: go now whenever you please." Monaldi, in amazement at finding his inmost thoughts thus discovered, determined to say next morning a mass of the Holy Spirit, to obtain light from God. In offering the divine Sacrifice his desire to be a Capuchin wholly disappeared, and he gave up all intention of changing his state of life. Afterwards, when he left the Congregation, he thought of becoming parish priest of Mandola, but was diverted from his purpose by Father Angelo, who told him that he hoped God had something better in store for

him; and so it happened, for Cardinal Gherardi, then Bishop of Camerino, appointed him soon after to a benefice in his diocese. Once again when he was offered a parish in another city, Monaldi on consulting Father Angelo was told by him that if he accepted it, he would meet with such troubles and opposition, that they would almost drive him to despair. Undeterred by this advice, Monaldi accepted the offer; but he soon found to his cost the truth of Father Angelo's prediction. The contradictions which came upon him there so completely overpowered him, that he determined to throw himself into a well; and he was only prevented from accomplishing his design by unexpectedly hearing the sound of a shepherd's pipe, which made him fear lest he should be discovered in the act. The Servant of God however who had foretold his misfortunes, sent for him two days later on some pretext or other to the church of S. John, where he was living, and by the efficacy of his words induced him to lay aside completely his wicked purpose.

In like manner, when a parish priest of Senalto, in the diocese of San Severino, came to consult him upon some secret matters, before he could open his mouth Father Angelo narrated to him in order what was in his mind. The priest convinced that he could have known it only by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, conceived such an esteem for him, that he looked upon him thenceforth as a saint. A noble young lady of Camerino went one day to confession in the church of the Oratory in order to prepare

herself for communion, and meeting Father Angelo, she asked him to send for her confessor. "What are you going to say to him?" replied the servant of God, "such and such things, eh! now go at once and communicate." The lady affirmed that it was with the greatest astonishment she heard him thus declare the exact state of her conscience. It happened that this same lady had a peculiar horror at the sight of a skull. Once she was in church listening to Matteucci, who was preaching, when he suddenly turned towards her, and said, "Daughter, place a skull on such a table, in such a room." The young lady was greatly amazed at these words, since it was impossible for Father Angelo either to know her fear of a skull or the particular room and table to which he alluded. What made the circumstance still more surprising was, that from that moment her terror entirely vanished, and she would not in future have minded keeping a skull on her table by day or even by night.

Sancio Stramiglioli Cerusico of Camerino, an intimate friend of Father Angelo, from the desire he had to mortify his body, resolved one night to sleep on boards, without however taking counsel with his confessor. Going the next day to the church of the Oratory, he saluted Father Angelo according to custom, who received him most affectionately, and then, although it was not connected in any way with the subject of conversation, cautioned him against attempting a greater severity towards himself than his con-

stitution would permit, adding that it is not well to do anything without one's confessor's advice. From this Cerusico clearly perceived that Matteucci was fully acquainted with what he had done.

To mention another instance: Father Angelo once sent Brother Dionysio Pieragostino to S. Vittoria on some business, but as he did not come back at the proper time, his relations became anxious, and were about to despatch a messenger to inquire after him. When Father Angelo heard this, he sent to Dionysio's relatives, bidding them lay aside their apprehensions, as he was quite well and would soon be back. It happened according to the father's prediction, for he returned safely the next morning. Angelo's sister Agnesa Matteucci, abbess of the monastery of S. Catherine's at San Severino, a person of great prudence and virtue, affirmed that her brother had often given her notice of many things relating to her office which he could not have known except supernaturally.

Lastly, when the Oratory was transferred to the church of S. John, among other discomforts they suffered from a want of water. Suddenly one day Father Angelo pointing to a particular spot, bade them dig there and when they had done so, they found to their great joy the mouth of a well full of water. The fame of this getting abroad, the servant of God was questioned as to how he had discovered the well, while others who were not blind knew nothing of it. Endeavouring to conceal the prodigy, he answered

that the blind, though they do not see, can think, and that he had found the water merely by thinking.

Father Angelo had also the gift which the apostle calls discernment of spirits, so that he could tell perfectly whether a person's desires to embrace a new state of life came from God or not. Hence Father Nicolò of Cingoli, the Capuchin, a great servant of God, when he was novice-master in the convent at Camerino, used frequently to send to him persons desirous of entering the order, that he might examine their vocation. Father Nicolò on one occasion writing from Cingoli to Matteucci, expressed himself as follows: "Submitting all my own opinions to yours, I feel certain that in doing whatever you say I cannot go wrong;" which words evidence both his own humility and the high esteem he had for Father Angelo.

God further honoured His servant by bestowing many different graces through his means. Signor Vittorio Lancellotto was very ill at Rome, and knowing well the holiness of Matteucci, he caused a letter to be written to his nephew, telling him to go at once to Father Angelo, and recommend him earnestly to his prayers; and so great was Vittorio's faith, that he directed his nephew to note down the hour and the moment at which he went to the servant of God. The nephew did as he was told, and on comparing the periods afterwards, it was discovered that at the very time he spoke to Father Angelo, the sick man began to amend, and soon after to

the surprise of all perfectly recovered his health. In reward for the patience with which Angelo bore his own blindness, God enabled him to restore sight to others. A young lad had completely lost the use of his eyes from some lime which had fallen into them. He remained for eight days in this state and the physicians had not been able to do anything for him. At length by the advice of some one he caused himself to be conducted to Father Angelo, who moved by compassion made the sign of the cross over him, and with such happy result that the lad had gone but a few steps when he found himself cured. The same thing happened to Father Giulio Mazzurelli of the Oratory of Ripa Franzona, who had lost the sight of one eye, and suffered greatly in the other. Father Giulio knowing of no better physician, went to Father Angelo, who after exhorting him to bear willingly whatever God sent him, made the sign of the cross upon his eyes, and set him free from the disease. Matteucci also so effectually cured a lad of epilepsy, to which he was subject, that he was never attacked by it again. A lady named Gineura Benigno, who was suffering greatly from sciatica, had heard that at a certain place called Cancelli there was some one who could cure her complaint. Though very anxious to go there, she first asked Father Angelo's advice, who disapproved of the plan ; upon which Gineura entreated him, since he would not let her go, at least to make the sign of the cross over her. Matteucci could not refuse this request, and the lady without quitting Camerino

was perfectly restored to health. He endeavoured on one occasion to dissuade a lady of the house of Camino, called Settimia, from going to a country house with her brother; but she replying that her brother would not let her remain behind, the good father told her to prepare herself then for a cross. Soon after her departure she fell and dislocated her foot, and after remaining in bed for many days without getting better, she was at last brought back again to the city. Father Angelo upon this came to visit her, and when he had made the usual sign of the cross, she felt the dislocated bones return to their proper position and was instantly well. Ruspantino Ruspantini, a brother of the Congregation, had suffered patiently for many months a disease in one of his toes, which almost prevented him from walking. At length being one evening with Father Angelo, he begged him to make the sign of the cross over the diseased place. Angelo's humility was wounded by this request, and he answered that to do so would only perhaps increase the evil; however he yielded at last, and a perfect cure was the result. Ruspantino well deserved this favour from the father, for he was a person of great virtue, very observant of the rules and constitutions, and above all most obedient and diligent in performing the offices imposed upon him. He lived thirty-four years in the Congregation, and left behind him a great reputation of virtue, which he crowned by the exemplary patience with which he bore a long and painful illness. The humble Matteucci made use of the

same plea, that it might make the evil worse, to avoid signing a cross upon the shoulder of a lady of the family of Mazzarosti, who was in great suffering, until overcome by compassion he acceded to her entreaties, and the pain at once left her and never returned again.

He not only healed the sick by making the sign of the cross upon them with his hands, but a similar virtue resided in things which he had made use of. Monsignor, afterwards Cardinal Cesarini, was repeatedly cured of violent headaches by the application of a cap belonging to Father Angelo. Father Nicolò of Cingoli, the Capuchin, a man very well known for his virtue, declared that once, when he was lying dangerously ill in his native country, he caused one of Father Angelo's caps to be brought to him, and as soon as it came near him he felt sensibly better, and in a very short time perfectly recovered his health.

In one of Matteucci's journeys he came to the city of Macerata, where he preached to some nuns. He was afterwards asked to go up to the grate, and one of them taking hold of his hair applied it to a painful sore from which she was suffering. Her faith met with its reward, for she was perfectly cured by the touch. Another nun of the monastery of S. Catherine at San Severino, by drinking a little wine which he had left, was freed from a violent tooth-ache. Many other cures were wrought by him during his life-time which we shall omit for brevity's sake. It only remains to mention some of the graces

which were granted through his intercession after his death, for in the words of Father Aringhi, "Heaven afterwards bore witness to his sanctity by evident miracles." Ortentio Smamiglioli of Urbino Cerusico in Camerino, who opened the body of the Servant of God after death, received as a reward for his labour the health of his son; for on applying to him a rag dipped in Angelo's blood, his son, who had been suffering from an illness very hard to cure, immediately recovered. The wife of another physician, whom her husband had in vain tried to cure, was restored to health by a relic of Father Angelo, and in gratitude for the favour she sent a votive tablet to his tomb. D. Venanzo Castaldi of Camerino was freed from acute pains in the loins by girding himself with a handkerchief dipped in Matteucci's blood. Pier Antonio Bonomi, a gentleman of Camerino, when labouring under a violent fever, was no sooner touched by a cap which had belonged to Father Angelo, than the flush immediately left his cheeks, his pulse became regular, and he was declared by the physicians to be entirely cured of the disease.

There was a woman at Cingoli near Ancona, who had been unable to eat anything for many days owing to a complaint in her throat, so that the physician who attended her had given up all hopes of her recovery. A rag dipped in Matteucci's blood was brought her, and no sooner had it been applied than she became able to swallow food, and very soon she was quite

well. A mason in Camerino was attacked by a fever, and instead of going to the physicians, he applied to himself a relic of Father Matteucci, and in recompense of his faith the fever left him. Lastly, at Cingoli, a lady called Virginia Sacchetti, who was suffering acute pain in one of her eyes, was visited by a relation, who after talking to her of the sanctity and virtues of Father Angelo, in order that she might conceive a devotion to him, at last produced a rosary which had belonged to him, and touching Virginia's eye with it took his leave. Meanwhile the pain left her, and next morning she sent word to her relation that she had been cured immediately after he had gone away.

CHAPTER VI.

LIVES OF SOME OF THE EARLY FATHERS OF THE ORATORY OF CAMERINO, AND ALSO OF A BROTHER OF THE EXTERNAL ORATORY.

Angelo Masciatici, a noble youth of Camerino, in his early days led a wild and irregular life. Being touched at length by grace, he betook himself to Father Matteucci, who soon afterwards received him into the Congregation, A. D. 1615. From the time he entered these sacred walls, he led a life of the most austere penance, edifying and astonishing all by the completeness of his transformation. The licentiousness of his

past life served this good father for a perpetual motive of humiliation, and it is scarcely conceivable how earnestly after his conversion he strove to advance in contempt and abasement of himself, thus changing his former offences into material for the exercise of virtue. During the six years he lived in the Oratory, his fervour was excessive and unabating. He died November 11th, 1621, deeply lamented by all the fathers and brothers of the Congregation; especially by Father Matteucci, who was well acquainted with the marvellous change grace had wrought in him.

Father Francesco Claudii, a man of great learning and spirituality, was previously to joining the Congregation, a canon and theological prebendary of the Cathedral of Ascoli in La Marca. Frequent reports having reached him at Ascoli, of the sanctity of the first fathers of the Oratory of Camerino, he paid a visit to that city for the sole purpose of making their acquaintance. He was lodged in the house of the fathers, and soon had abundant opportunities of observing closely their exemplary actions. He saw with astonishment Father Democrito Matteucci, who was at that time the guest-master, perform in the room which was assigned to him the lowest and humblest offices imaginable. He remarked the extreme poverty which appeared in the house, particularly in the rooms over the church, where the fathers lived, and which were very incommodious, and so badly roofed that the snow, as has been said, penetrated through the beams in the winter time.

Lastly, he was struck by the zeal which they manifested for the sanctification both of their own and of their neighbours' souls. Altogether these things made such an impression upon him, that he resigned his canonry, which was a lucrative one, and applied for admission into their society. On becoming a son of S. Philip, he devoted himself in a way which caused general admiration to the functions of his vocation, and he persevered in this course during the thirty-two remaining years of his life. He was indefatigable in the confessional, and in preaching, even at a time when from old age and infirmities he needed the assistance of two persons to go up the stairs of the pulpit. Like a good Father of the Oratory, he was much given to prayer. He was also well acquainted with human learning, but especially with theology, so much so that he was commonly called the Theologian. He left the Congregation a valuable library which he had collected, and it was remarked that there was not one of his books which he had not annotated with his own hand. Every one in Camerino held him in the highest esteem, and he was habitually consulted in matters of the greatest importance. Finally, he was elected Superior by acclamation, and after a long life spent in God's service, he died of a malignant fever, March 9th, 1673, leaving all his property to the Congregation.

Father Fabio Aresti, of a noble family in Camerino, was distinguished for his virtues and singular devotion to the Virgin Mother of God.

From a desire to serve God more perfectly, he preferred entering the Congregation of S. Philip to the enjoyment of the ecclesiastical benefices which he possessed. He was received February 18th, 1642, and after the three years of noviciate were over, in which he gave evidence of a very mature virtue, he was appointed to hear confessions and preach in the church. In this last office his devotion to the Queen of Angels was conspicuous, for Her praises were his ordinary theme. He further showed his filial affection to our Lady by causing a chapel to be erected in Camerino in Her honour; and he himself provided for a sufficient endowment to insure the Divine Sacrifice being offered up there. He also gave a silver-gilt lamp to our Lady's altar in the church of the Congregation, and made provision that a light should be always kept burning in it at his expense. It is not wonderful that one so devoted to the Queen of Purity should hold immodesty in such abhorrence, that he could not bear to hear a single word in the slightest degree contrary to the rules of delicacy. Moreover he detested idleness as the parent of immodesty; and hence he devoted all the time which remained to him after his prayers, studies and other employments to painting in miniature sacred pictures, an art in which he greatly excelled. He was very attentive to the cleanliness and neatness of the church of the Congregation, and he took care that it was always provided with the necessary furniture. His charity to the poor was very great, and

he both sympathized with their miseries, and endeavoured to aid them as far as his means would permit. He was several times elected Superior of the Congregation, and performed this office in the most exemplary manner. After his patience had been tested by severe sufferings from the gout, he was carried off by a fever while still in his prime, to the grief not only of the fathers and brothers of the Congregation, but of the whole city of Camerino.

Father Girolamo Barnabei was of a very illustrious family in Camerino. He was admitted into the congregation of the Oratory May 18th, 1630, and he continued in it during the space of forty-nine years. Although adorned with many great virtues, Father Girolamo seemed to have given his undivided attention to the practice of humility, of which he was every day making continual acts. From the time he entered the Congregation, his aim both in the house and out of doors was to obtain for himself, as his due, all the lowliest offices. He was perpetually in the kitchen, doing the meanest work there; and he made it his business to sweep out carefully the most repulsive places of the house. In like manner, as if he had been a household servant, he never blushed to fetch water for the use of the house from the convent of the Observantine Friars. When the first places at table fell to him as he advanced in standing, his humility made him come in to dinner late, if persons of distinction, such as cardinals, bishops or prelates

were to be present, in order that he might thus obtain his favourite place, which was the last. Similarly, when from his great age he became dean of the Congregation, one of whose duties is to say grace in the absence of the superior, Father Girolamo used to come as late as possible to the refectory, and if after he had entered the superior did not appear, he begged the next father to pronounce the blessing, in order to escape doing anything which savoured even remotely of superiority. The same feelings of humility prevented him from ever accepting the office of superior, though it was earnestly pressed upon him by the electors. He was very well versed in every branch of learning, but especially in moral theology. Owing to his reputation in this science, Mgr. Altieri, afterwards Pope, and Cardinal Franzoni, who were successively bishops of Camerino, wished several times to appoint him Synodal Examiner, but his humility made him refuse the honour as being wholly unworthy of it. He however gladly employed himself even at night in giving instructions to some of the lay-brothers in spiritual things, or in reading to them devout books. To increase his humility, he delighted to dress poorly. His clothes were generally torn and patched, and he would never allow new ones to be made for him, until his own were entirely worn out. Although humility loves to conceal itself, it cannot escape the eyes of the servants of God. This will account for the high esteem which S. Joseph of Cupertino, the Franciscan had for Father Girolamo, and the intimate friendship

which grew up between them during the frequent visits which the latter paid to Assisi. Father Barnabei was also remarkable for his constant mortification of the eyes, and deeply convinced of S. Philip's maxim, that in the war of the senses cowards gain the day, he shunned as far as possible all conversation with women. Finally, he placed himself under the special protection of the Queen of Virgins, to whom he had an exceeding devotion, and in whose honour he left a legacy to provide for high mass being sung in the church on Her seven principal feasts. The patience of the Servant of God is only too well authenticated, for having unhappily wounded himself with a hatchet in one of his legs, he said nothing about the hurt from his great thirst for sufferings, so that it was not discovered until a gangrene had formed which the physicians were unable to cure. He died on February the 21st, 1679, after having served God in the Congregation of Camerino for forty-nine years.

We will now conclude this narrative with a brief account of Lorenzo Belloni, a member of the external Oratory, which after the fashion of a confraternity is composed of people living in the world. Lorenzo was a disciple of Father Angelo Matteucci, and the inseparable companion of the Servant of God, Brother Dionisio Pieragostini: he was by occupation a silk weaver. This good secular never left the church of the Oratory on festivals except to take a little food, and he remained there all day long, in unbroken prayer,

hidden in a remote chapel from men's eyes. On other days he never failed to attend the exercises of the Oratory and the public prayer in the evening. He approached the most holy Sacraments three times a week with the greatest preparation and devotion. He continually exercised himself in making acts of faith, hope and charity, and especially of the love of God. He was present daily at the holy Sacrifice, and his life was so exemplary that he was commonly known by the name of Lorenzo the Good. The fervour which he felt in his prolonged prayers was such, that the floor of the chapel in which he prayed was sometimes wet with the sweat that rolled from him, and he was often obliged to change his clothes from head to foot when he returned home. All the time that he sat working at his loom, his mind was employed in devout meditations. The result of this continued converse with God was that, although he had a natural impediment in his speech, he discoursed with so much eloquence and depth about the most Holy Trinity, the Divine Attributes, the Passion and the other mysteries of our religion, that even persons of eminence, such as prelates, bishops, and cardinals, listened with pleasure to his words, and were filled with astonishment at the correctness of his terms, so far beyond his natural capacity. Lorenzo both foresaw and predicted in the presence of many persons his approaching death, expressing at the same time his ardent longing to unite himself with the God of his heart. He desired to be buried in the

Church of the Oratory, that, as he said, his body might rest till the resurrection day where he had spent the greater part of his life. His body was embalmed after death, and exposed in the church of the Congregation, which was thronged by people who strove with one another to obtain a relic of him. It was then buried as he had requested in an honourable part of the church.

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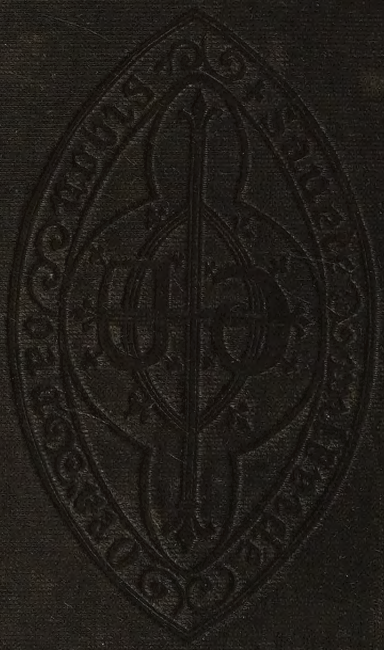
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